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*THE
NEW
CHRISTIANS*

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in the City of New York



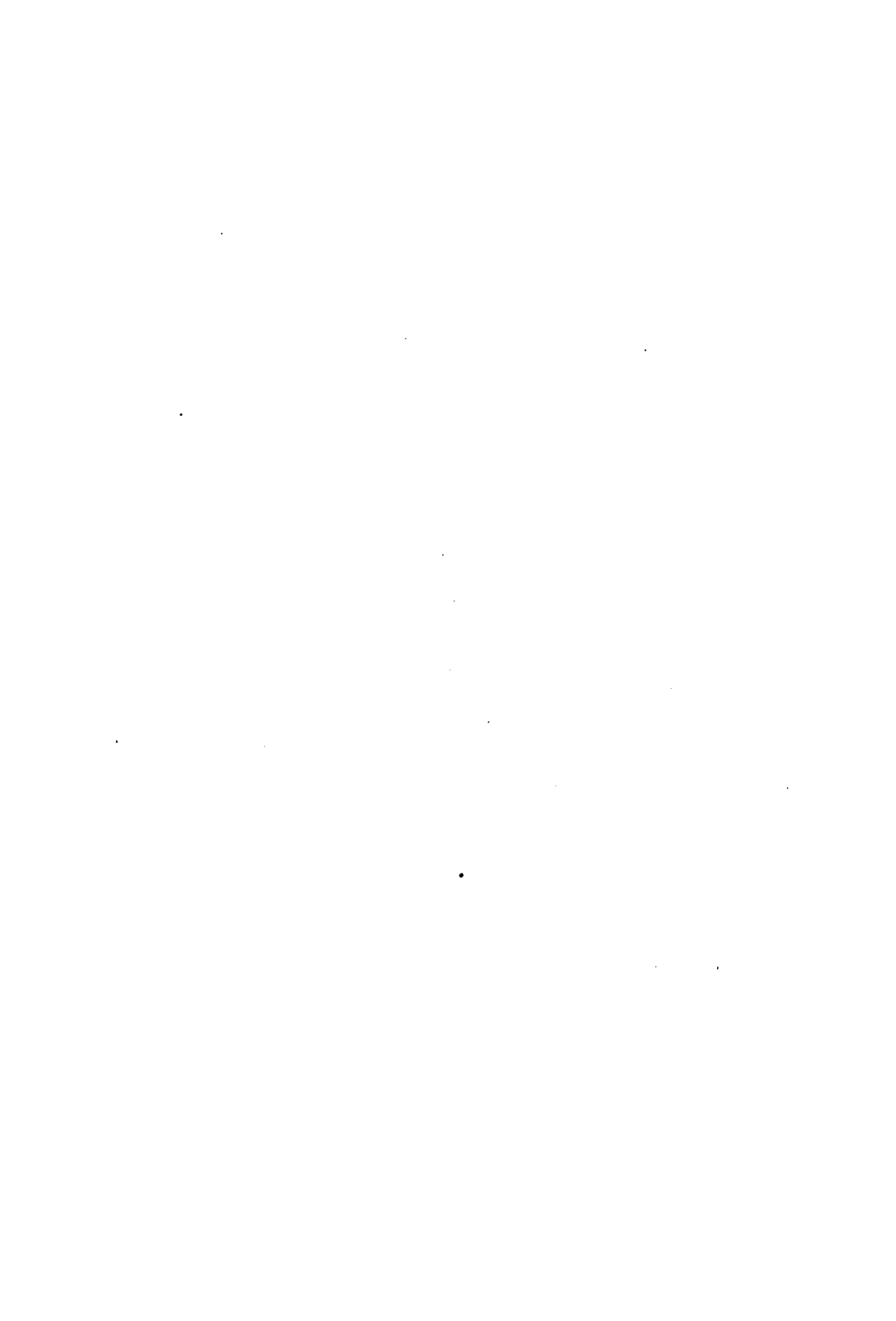
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THE NEW CHRISTIANS

By

PERCY WHITE

*Author of "Mr. Bailey-Martin," "Corruption,"
"Passionate Pilgrim," "The West End," Etc.*



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The New Christians

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THE NEW CHRISTIANS

CHAPTER I

EUSTACE FENNER, author of "Spiritual Evolution," editor of *Torch of Faith and Science*, leader in London of the New Christians, was a man of great emotional possibilities, considerable eloquence, and exceeding tact. When the name of "New Christians" was given in derision to the branch of the Fashionable Sect which looked to him for guidance, he said: "Although our fidelity and trust have made us the direct beneficiaries of the first followers of Him who founded our faith, yet, in this age of enfeebled belief, we may joyfully accept the name, since that which has become young again may well be called 'new.'"

At these thrilling words, his hearers—mostly ladies elaborately dressed and glowing with freshly acquired zeal for a creed equally capable of curing a cancer or converting a criminal—exchanged appreciative glances which meant, “Instinct told us that he had grasped the situation.”

Then the congregation, as was their wont, proceeded to treat the question silently for five minutes. When the words, “We are the New Christians,” began to glow in the solemn, mental light of their massed contemplation, the Church stirred mysteriously with silken rustlings and faint murmurs. “I think,” said the silver-voiced Eustace, from the platform, where he sat with brows bent on his white hands, quickly recognizing the simple manifestations, “I think that an answer has been vouchsafed!”

In due course the congregation separated and went home to dress for whatever engagements the late hour permitted.

“At all events if they called us ‘New Christians,’” reflected the initiates, whose levity had yet to be cured, “they cannot possibly confuse us with New Women.”

But this incident in the Church’s brief history occurred a year ago, and Eustace Fenner, as he sat at breakfast in his rooms at the back of Mount Street, over the florist’s shop, now remembered without astonishment that he was a professional New Christian, who, in spite of his Faith, was not entirely happy, or free from earthly cares. The Committee of Church management trusted him, and his allowances would have been adequate had he not sought perfection so sedulously. He sought it in his furniture, in the binding of his books, in his colored engravings, in his food, his wines, his cigarettes.

“I do love the best so dearly,” he admitted, “whether it be in material or spiritual things.”

For beauty is a part of the New Christian

Cult. The beautiful thought, impelled by the faith within, shapes the beautiful form. From the face of the perfected New Christian the wrinkles fall. She knows no illness, needs no material remedies, can defy all draughts with her pure white shoulders. Under the beneficent breath of the New Creed the ugly old Puritanism has vanished. The Purity is all that remains of that grim religious record. The good and the beautiful are as much one to the New Christian as to the happy Greek hedonist of the artistic imagination.

Which things, but in far more beautiful words, Eustace had told his congregation many times.

To-day, if he dared, he would have liked to ask them for more money, for, on his very human side, he had had dealings in mining shares, and as a consequence owed money which he could not pay. He was inconvenienced, too, by an over-draft at his bankers,

who, by the morning's post and in the baldest terms—and Eustace disliked undecorated phrases—had “called his attention” to the fact.

Yet Eustace was not tempted to seek in his Faith a remedy for his worldly troubles. Whenever an erring member of his congregation, incapable of grasping the idea that matter is not an entity having independent life—an effort in mentality for which long practice is necessary—desired (as sometimes happened) that Eustace should employ Mind Science as a remedy for want of money, the enquirer learnt that the brotherhood and union necessary for the system would be destroyed by so gross a misuse of Power. Consequently Eustace did not apply his Faith to convert his over-draft at the bankers' into a substantial balance in his favor nor even think of misusing his power to compel creditors to forgo their debts.

Instead of this, he endeavored to defer the

reckoning by his adroitness as a correspondent.

If only they would not worry him about such things, he reflected, how much more useful he might have been to the world.

Still, Eustace's worries were not acute enough that morning to spoil his breakfast. When he had finished he rang the bell, lit a cigarette, and looked at his closely shaved face in the glass, observing with regret "a worried look." It was a remarkable face. Although not yet in his fortieth year, his hair was prematurely white, but his cheeks were smooth and healthily colored, whilst the lines at the corners of his pathetic eyes were faint. His mouth was, perhaps, slightly too large, —but, as his admirers said, it was such a generous mouth!—and his lips a little too loose.

If you had passed Eustace in the Strand, you would have mistaken him for an eminent actor; in the neighborhood of the Law Courts for a King's Councilor; or, meeting him in

Harley Street, for a brilliant ladies' doctor. You could not overlook his air of distinction. He was so obviously somebody. His dress, his hair—worn longer than is customary outside the artistic profession—his loose, flowing necktie of foreign origin, his low collar, his immaculate linen, his glossy hat with the straight, broad brim, all helped to raise him to picturesque levels above the crowd which "does nothing."

And so at last Eustace turned from the mirror with a faint sigh. Certainly he pitied himself. How foolish to dabble in mining shares! Why harass the New Christian's soul with such squalors! But then he thought he had been so well advised, for were there not even stock-brokers in his flock?

However, it was useless to worry. He supposed it would come right somehow.

The servant meanwhile, who had entered the room to remove the breakfast things, annoyed him by the awkwardness of her service.

"If I stay in the room," he reflected, "I shall speak irritably and unkindly to her."

To avoid this risk he went into his study, a small room, not too well lighted, looking on a mews and containing a handsome book-case full of books of a serious aspect, and much of the loosely bound literature of the New Christians and the affiliated Faiths.

Here, at his writing-table, Eustace sat carefully polishing his nails with an ivory apparatus, till a sharp knock at his door startled him.

"Come in!" said he.

It was Jane, the new servant, with a note.

"Please, Jane," he said gently, "never knock except at my bedroom door, but come right in—only as quietly as you can."

"A Special Messenger boy has brought this, sir," said the maid.

He recognized the writing. It was from Mrs. Galbraith, a member of their committee and the most brilliant of the New Christians attending his meetings.

The note said that she wished to consult him about a most interesting case, and hoped that, if he could spare the time, he would come to lunch.

Eustace's reply was brief—

“With pleasure, dear Mrs. Galbraith!”

He hesitated a moment, in doubt whether he should add the note of exclamation. Having added it, he proceeded to deal with his correspondence, most of which was addressed to him at the “New Christian Church,” in Wiggpole Street, where, some years before, the “White Theosophists” used to hold their meetings. But although this odd sect, as an organized body, had vanished, an ignorant neighborhood still insisted on confusing the tenets of the two creeds, in spite of Eustace's frequent explanations that Theosophy bore no more resemblance to the system which he taught “than the odor of the upas tree to the sweet breath of spring.”

The correspondence consisted for the most

part of inquiries concerning the nature and number of New Christian miracles and the percentage of recorded successes. To answer these, forms had been prepared, advising the inquirers to read the *Torch of Faith and Science*, a journal containing all necessary information and giving carefully compiled statistics of cures.

Whilst Eustace was filling up his forms it occurred to him that a youthful secretary could discharge that part of the duties with greater expedition. Was it not wrong to waste his energy, the stock of which he felt was limited? He decided to consult Mrs. Galbraith, who was so practical on all questions of organization.

The policy of the New Christians was to avoid frivolous gossip. Letters asking whether it was a fact that the Duke and Duchess of Abbobrothock had stamped out an epidemic of measles in the Hebrides, or "wishing to be informed whether it were true,

as stated in the *Daily Imperial Gazette*, that twenty-five per cent of the peerage had embraced the tenets of the new faith," were left unanswered.

An hour's work settled Eustace's correspondence for that morning. Then, having refreshed himself with a novel for another hour, he rang for his boots, and started to walk across the Park in the direction of Lancaster Gate, to lunch with Mrs. Galbraith.

It was a beautiful May day. The thorn trees were in bloom, the thrushes singing in the bushes.

As Eustace smoked his cigarette he felt he could have been perfectly happy in so pleasant a world but for his unfortunate investments.

His capital at that moment consisted only of £5!

It was laughable for a man in his position. Few men with his sense of leadership and insight into human character, he was persuaded,

would have been willing to remain so poor. His detached attitude towards money he attributed to that artistic temperament which all recognized as a predominant feature in his character.

Eustace was still thinking, perhaps overfondly, of himself when he rang Mrs. Galbraith's bell.

Mrs. Galbraith was a woman with—the phrase was used by Eustace—a matchless temperament. Certainly no member of the new Church realized so fully the dogma that “sin, like disease, was an illusion—an assumption that nothing was something, and therefore unreal.”

To that lucid brain the most attenuated definitions of the creed presented no difficulties. Eustace himself, in some of his earthlier moods, although he bravely combated them, was conscious that the verbal explanations of their doctrines reached a tenuity at which meaning seems to vanish.

He could never have taught with conviction that faith begins where words fail but for the encouragement of her unwavering belief. Certainly she had a beautiful soul! Until language became spiritualized the most sensitive truths must evade verbal interpretation. To Mrs. Galbraith this natural dogma requisite to their creed presented no difficulty. Phrases which, to the uninitiated, seemed pure nonsense, to her spiritualized intellect were full of meaning.

And how helpful she was! So rich, yet so unworldly! As ready with her purse as with her illuminating understanding.

The man-servant conducted Eustace to the drawing-room, a charming apartment, happy with flowers, bright with water-color drawings, overlooking the green trees of Kensington Gardens through arched sun-blinds.

As Eustace sat by the open window and waited he recalled the story of the friend who

had done more than any one else on this side of the Atlantic to strengthen the Faith which he had imported from the other.

Her husband had been an energetic Radical orator whom implacable critics described as a hot-headed faddist. For an excitable member of Parliament who believes absolutely in the truth of opinions at which men apparently as able as himself scoff, one thing is needful. His heart—as a physical organ, not necessarily as a spiritual center—must be sound. But Galbraith in this respect was organically ill equipped. The valves of the heart which beat under his apparently stalwart breast were diseased. But his spirit was high, and he strained it to the utmost, until one day they found him dead in an armchair in the library of his club.

After his death his widow, who revered his memory, became Eustace's first convert, accepting the most delicate, and, if the word be permitted, most unthinkable doctrines, with

a spiritual ease "comparable," Eustace had remarked, "in the physical world only to the delight of some white-winged bird in the blue freedom of the air." Reciprocally Mrs. Galbraith's faith in Eustace strengthened Eustace's faith in himself.

No disaster could daunt her confidence that, in the moral as in the physical world, the good and the beautiful will ultimately prevail.

A year after her husband's death Mrs. Galbraith's only son was drowned yachting. The disaster, in the words of Eustace Fenner, only strengthened the mother's faith in "the irrefutable logic and spiritual beauty of their creed."

And this serene, noble-minded woman, of middle age, but of still enduring beauty, sought his advice and looked to him as a leader!

"I must be worthy of it!" thought Eustace, as the door opened and his hostess, beauti-

fully dressed in pale blue *crêpe de chine*, entered the room.

“We all thought at Wiggpole Street that you were enjoying the spring at Bletchford,” said Eustace, rising to greet his friend.

“I came up to town to consult you,” said Mrs. Galbraith.

“That means you want to help some one.”

“Sit down there and I will tell you,” said she, pointing to a low armchair just outside the pattern which a shaft of sunlight traced on the soft carpet. She sat opposite. The sunbeam quivered between them like a golden flower shaped in a geometrician’s brain.

“It is about a case I am deeply interested in,” resumed Mrs. Galbraith.

“Then it is a human soul,” said Eustace.

“Yes, a woman’s,” she replied. “Do you remember once, driving with me from Bletchford to Port Righton, that I showed you the Red House—the place where Miss Lee used to live?”

"I remember," said he, "a square-shouldered place behind trees, with its back turned to the sea."

"Yes. It now belongs to Captain Lee's widow."

But Eustace often stayed at Bletchford with Mrs. Galbraith and never forgot the faintest rumor which stirred in any neighborhood that he chanced to visit.

"I know," said he. "Mrs. Lee was a Miss Selby, who lost her husband in India a year or two after their marriage."

"What a memory you have, Mr. Fenner!" she said, admiring his alertness. "The case is a pitiful one, because of her complete unbelief."

"What influence have you over her?" he asked.

"The poor girl is now on a sort of ghostly pilgrimage, visiting the places she and Hubert Lee once saw together."

"The experiment the suffering soul often

practices on itself!" said he. "But of what type is she?"

"Quite lovely, and twenty-seven."

"And so far you have done nothing, Mrs. Galbraith?"

"I have not dared to try. She suspects me because I'm a New Christian. She regards us as a modified form of the Salvation Army imported from America for the spiritual amusement of the leisured classes."

"That is a man's phrase," said Eustace, now deep in the problem. "No doubt one picked up from her father." Then he reflected a moment and added, "I can't help, Mrs. Galbraith, unless I see Mrs. Lee."

Mrs. Galbraith's serene face slightly clouded.

"The case, it seems to me, is this," he went on. "We have a beautiful young woman who believes her affections are a mere crumpled heap of wreckage in her memory. She has lost her love; is overwhelmed with a

sense of loneliness and plunged in the black depths of unfaith. Unless we save her, her soul must soon die—as ninety souls in a hundred do—of spiritual atrophy. That is my diagnosis.”

Mrs. Galbraith looked at him approvingly, wondering at his swift grasp.

“But what,” she asked, “can we do?”

“Induce her to come to stay with you here. Get her beyond the range of her father’s agnostic guns. The case is a difficult one, but not hopeless.”

But at this point lunch was announced, during which the interests of their Church were discussed and Mrs. Galbraith made the discovery that a secretary was needed for the coarser kind of correspondence.

If the other members of the committee disagreed, she was prepared, she said, to find the funds herself.

CHAPTER II

A FEW days after Eustace Fenner's interview with Mrs. Galbraith, Octavia Lee, the subject of it, was walking over the rolling downland towards the little church on the hill. Away to the south the round hills ended in a massed promontory of cliff and crag. Beyond stretched the gray-green sea. The salt airs gave a sterner under-sense to the spring odors.

As Octavia stood for a moment in the radiance of the morning and looked back over the green curves of the hills to the shining Channel, a chain of ruined hopes seemed stretched behind her. Between the brightness of the day and the somber hues of her disappointment the contrast was poignant. Still, for once the weight seemed lighter. A hundred unseen larks were singing in the

liquid blue above a landscape of freshest green. The sweet quiet of the place, welcoming her melancholy, had created a temporary sense of spiritual luxury. How full of happiness the earth seemed! From what mysterious source did it spring? What lay behind it—the materialism which her father taught, or—?

As she approached the church the questioning voices grew in strength. Simple, primitive faiths might find an answer under such moss-green roofs as that shining before her in the May sunshine; but she was one of those children of doubt whose interpreter is Renan. Trained in unbelief by the mere accident of her intellectual environment, she had never before—not even on that black day at the pillow of her dead husband—felt so overpowered by the sense of human helplessness, of helplessness this time faintly tinged with resignation.

Her whole being yearned for anchorage.

Behind this blue, under this ethereal spring morning, there must be something but death. Was the beauty clothing the world and melting in the sky merely the chance manifestation of a self-organized matter? Far in the recesses of self, echoes stirred beyond reach of human speech; thought seemed hovering on the verge of a luminous abyss, waiting for a sign.

The mood possessing her was one she had never experienced before. What would that lonely church offer her? Her heart beat with strange expectancy as she opened the wicket gate and followed the remembered path over the grassy graves.

It was a melancholy little church, beautiful and mysterious from age, with square Norman tower swept by the autumnal gales and beaten by the winter rains of nine hundred years.

For days Octavia had feared to visit it again, but that morning the glorious sunshine had tempted her.

It was here, among the forgotten graves, that her husband first told her that he loved her. Half-unconsciously she was now making on her heart one of those melancholy experiments in which the balance of remembered happiness measures the sum of present sorrow.

Her thoughts traced out her own simple story. They had stepped into each other's life from some commonplace association of John Selby with Hubert Lee's father, a Deputy-Inspector-General of Ordnance at the time the Government had purchased the "Selby Fuse."

Octavia and her father were staying at the little hotel at Port Righton, Hubert Lee was visiting his aunt at the Red House.

To-day the Red House was hers. What changes in a few years!

She vividly recalled that September day, now seven years ago. They stood by this same gate. Her lover was by her side; the

happy autumn wind was rolling masses of fleecy cloud across the sky, chasing shadows over sea and land, driving the sense of loneliness out of waste places.

From the garden of the thatched, steep-roofed cottage a woman in a sun-bonnet, standing among the hydrangeas, had watched them benignantly. Octavia glanced over the low wall, expecting to see her again. But the garden, overgrown with weeds, had also felt the change, the windows were boarded up, there were no children to pluck the wallflowers where the bees were humming.

Octavia passed the graves, now bright with buttercups and daisies, and lingered for a moment at the porch. Both doors were open, revealing pious glooms and the sudden leap into the sunlight beyond. Under the arched stone, crowned by a crumbling gargoyle, the spring murmurs drifted, stirring slumberous echoes under blackened oak rafters.

The faint, moldy breath of the dead cen-

turies met Octavia as she entered the church—this time alone.

“O Death, where is thy victory?” asked a half-effaced epitaph on the damp-stained, whitewashed walls.

The victory seemed to Octavia without, in the brilliant sunshine, in the wonderful life of spring; not within, amid the shadows and caged memories of transitory ages and forgotten generations.

And so she stood in the narrow aisle listening till she almost heard the remembered step of her lover on the worn stones. Surely the victory was Death's!

Within nothing was changed. She saw the same dog's-eared hymn-books in the rusty pews; the same ragged harmonium, the same soft lights drifting through stained glass, the same evidence of a decaying church in a dwindling parish of quarrymen and farmers.

Why had she sought this haunt of peaceful desolation? There was no comfort in it.

The thought gripped her heart. Seven years ago in the same place she had been so happy, but now——?

She sank in a low, rush-bottomed chair, and turning her eyes from the melancholy gloom about her, looked out on the sunshine through the door opposite that by which she had entered.

What she saw thrilled her with a new emotion.

She saw, springing like a pale flame from the summit of the green slope, and standing out, pure white, against the blue of the horizon, a beautiful sunlit cross. The radiant light bathed the dazzling stone till the crossing of the reflected rays created, for the gazer from the darkened church, the illusion of a stream of luminous incense hovering round a flawless symbol.

Octavia sat motionless for a moment, rapt as in a vision. Suddenly the icy feeling had fallen from her heart. Something—was it

half-dead faith?—mysteriously stirred and drew her to the cross.

The spot was admirably chosen for producing its effect. The cross, immaculate and shining, light yet massive, an emblem of eternal youth springing skyward from the turf, contrasted vividly with the neglected church and the graves of the forgotten. It seemed to Octavia to have leaped mysteriously from the very spot where, years before, she and her husband had stood gazing seaward across the same rolling, treeless hills.

As she had approached it she did not hear the larks, nor the plaintive cry of the passing gull, nor the lambs in the near field, nor yet the step behind her. The appeal of the gleaming stone, bare of inscription as the pedestal on which it stood, entranced her.

At the foot of the cross Octavia knelt in the long grass, and wept.

The lady who had watched her, knelt down, too, and prayed.

When at last Octavia's fit of weeping, with strange suddenness, ended, she raised her face from the grass where it had been hidden and felt her heart was lighter.

"Only hysteria," she thought. "What else can it be? It is a beautiful white cross, but its shadow is black."

She saw the shadow before her, but was still unconscious of that of the kneeling woman behind.

She was about to rise to her feet when she first became aware of it, yet, instead of embarrassing her, it soothed her.

"Forgive me," said a gentle voice which she recognized, "I felt that you did not see me. Perhaps my cross has helped to comfort you?"

Octavia, still kneeling, turned her wet eyes, and saw Mrs. Galbraith. Then, rising to her feet with recovered self-control, she said—

"The place is so full of memories. The

last time I was here I was with my husband——”

“I know,” interrupted Mrs. Galbraith. “I have a right to sympathize with you. Our sorrows are so alike.”

“There used to be no cross,” said Octavia, who, after her hysterical plunge, seemed to herself to be speaking in a dream.

“I raised it three years ago to my boy,” Mrs. Galbraith replied.

“It is very lovely,” said Octavia, looking intently at the shining white stone, “but it bears no inscription.”

“Because its message is for all,” replied Mrs. Galbraith, afraid to say what she longed to say lest the soul which, it seemed to her, had just been fluttering on the verge of belief should resent as patronage the comfort she longed to offer.

“What would Eustace Fenner have said had he been there?” she wondered.

Octavia, who knew the other’s story and

had attributed her resignation to want of feeling, now felt strongly attracted by a woman whom the week before she had secretly derided as a dabbler in feeble religious fads.

"I thought you were in London," she said stepping back resolutely into the practical world which she had unconsciously left.

"I returned last night," Mrs. Galbraith answered, divining Octavia's intention. Then turning toward the cross again, she added: "I often come up here to think by that, and never leave it without finding comfort. I am so glad to think that you found comfort too."

"I was in a mood," replied Octavia, "when the only remedy is a good cry. But I must go home. Edith will be missing me."

"How is Edith?"

"Very well. The place suits her. Her grandfather is coming down this evening. I think you have met him."

"At your wedding," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"I am coming over to see you soon. But let me drive you home. I left the carriage at the end of the village. The road here is too bad and steep."

Then side by side they passed out of the churchyard, through the quiet village street down to the main road.

The smart carriage, the gleaming harness, the finely matched chestnuts, the faultless liveries of coachman and footman, presented, in their aspect of brilliant worldly prosperity, a striking contrast to the emotions through which the two women had passed. There was something fate-defying in its complete prosperity.

Mrs. Galbraith's eye kindled as she saw her horses. "I love them," she said.

The horses champed their bits proudly, the cottagers glanced admiringly from their doors; a group of children, fresh from the village school, bobbed friendly curtsies, and Octavia and her friend, now serenely smiling,

drove off under the elms down the straight Olchester Road.

As they swung, lightly balanced on C springs and rubber tires, past the flowering thorn trees and pleasant hedgerows bordering the wayside, Octavia dreamily listened whilst Mrs. Galbraith explained the New Creed as Eustace Fenner taught it.

CHAPTER III

HITHERTO Octavia had regarded those who dabbled in novel forms of belief for the most part as weak-minded people of imperfect education. But from such as these Mrs. Galbraith, an accomplished woman of the world, in culture, manner, gesture, look, and dress, was obviously poles apart. The doctrines of the New Christians struck Octavia as shadowy dogmas clouded by half-meaningless phrases easily mistaken for the rattling jargon, such as most heady "religionists" brandish for argument, and which every new movement, pseudo-scientific or esthetic, invents. But then, Octavia felt instinctively that Mrs. Galbraith loved and pitied her, and sympathy blunts the edge of criticism.

The Red House, a ruddy, square structure of no particular period, harmonized agreeably

with the groups of forest trees hiding it from the road. Beyond it meadow lands descended to a lonely, heath-clad region, now bright with gorse and wild flowers, then came the pale grasses of the sand-hills, the sweep of a silvery beach, and the glitter of the sea. It was the first time that Octavia had stayed at the Red House, left to her by her husband as heir to his aunt.

After her husband's death, returning from India the young widow had lived on the Continent, lacking, it seemed, courage to come home. But for her father she would have let the place, the solitude of which at first had frightened her. Selby, however, discovered that the air "suited him," and found in consequence a dozen excellent reasons why his daughter should make the place her home.

"You can afford to keep a flat in town, my dear 'Tavia. What more can you want? I live in the Albany, and I certainly do think that we ought to have something definitely

resembling a center for breathing the domestic air."

Thus it came to pass, in the fourth year after her husband's death, that Octavia commenced to live the ordered life which her father desired for the joint family dignity and his personal convenience.

When Mrs. Galbraith's carriage had disappeared behind the larches at the gate, Octavia went into the square, low hall. But for the murmur from the distant kitchen all was still. The walls were hung with old wood-engravings and a few strange Oriental weapons, her husband's gifts to his aunt; the floor and oaken chairs were freshly polished, but to Octavia the whole place seemed regretfully looking back to the reign of the last owner.

She crossed the hall and entered the room known as the library. Through the green shutters the light entered in geometrically divided divisions alive with lustrous motes. The highest ray, quivering faintly from its

passage through the leaves of the creeper-covered window, reached her husband's portrait.

On the writing-table was a bundle of letters forwarded from her London address, and a telegram, which she opened.

It was from her father, and said: "Shall be down in time for dinner."

She was glad he was coming. Certainly the place was painfully quiet. In London there were no twilight silences to oppress her—but here! She listened again, and heard the faint murmurs in the garden. A thrush was singing on the lilac tree; the world, dreamy and restful, seemed full of the love now beyond her reach.

What should she do with her life? The numbed feeling that had followed her weeping was vanishing. Mrs. Galbraith might be just as lonely, but then she had her religion. Her power of belief might be a comfort, but was there not always within it an element

intellectually unbecoming? This was not apparent in Mrs. Galbraith's case, because her manner was so perfect, and—odd reason!—because she dressed so beautifully. Was she always, she wondered, so peaceful and restfully happy?

How strange to be any one's disciple to-day! Octavia had pictured Eustace Fenner to herself as the most modern variant of Mr. Sludge the Medium. Then, as she mused, it suddenly flashed on Octavia that she was thinking her father's thoughts. They moved across her mind in a sort of borrowed procession until she grew ashamed of them in the hushed gloom of the room.

She recrossed the hall and went into the drawing-room, unchanged since Miss Lee had left it, heavily scented with branches of her favorite white lilac, decorated with quiet green tints reflecting the quiet of the leaves and sloping meadows without. The air of the room seemed listless, as though no living

human emotion had ever stirred there. Octavia pulled aside the curtain, the faint breeze lifted the heavy fragrance of the lilac and rustled ghostly fancies. Through the window, with a sense of relief, she heard her child's voice. Edith and the nurse appeared at the gate, the pretty child carrying a handful of tall white daisies. Her mother watched her. She was like herself, not the father. "If I had only a son too," she thought regretfully.

Half a dozen children were needed to break the spell which twenty years of spinster government had left on the Red House.

She stepped into the sunshine to meet the little girl, who ran to her mother.

"Look!" she cried, showing her flowers; "look, mummy! This is much nicer than Kensington Gardens."

The nurse, fresh from London, maintained a frigid and neutral silence. The empty fields, the calm sea, oppressed a cockney soul

that longed for Hamilton Place and its streams of variegated traffic.

At lunch, which the child took with her, Octavia encouraged her daughter to talk. Edith kept up a running comment of chatter, comparing the Red House with the flat at Knightsbridge, which for a time they had rented. But in London Edith had many friends. She ran volubly through the list.

"If I only had a little girl to play with," she said, "I should like this much better. Can't you ask Jean, or Muriel, or Laura, or one of them to stay with me, mummy? I'd rather have quite a baby than nothing."

"I will see, darling," replied her mother vaguely.

All the long afternoon Octavia sat in the garden trying to read. Her thoughts rushed back to her life in India; she heard her husband's voice calling her behind the silence.

The glamour of the warm spring day lay over the country. The tall grass shone in the

sun, the birds were hushed in the afternoon heat. The deep tranquillity made her uneasy.

To break the monotony she went to the nursery, and tried to forget herself in childish games with Edith; while Nurse, withdrawing to the kitchen, gossiped plaintively with Cook. 'Twas the dullest hole she was ever in, that it was. Give her a man's voice about the place, if you please. Nurse was getting the creeps!

Cook, to comfort her, said that if she wanted a young man one might be picked up any Sunday at Olchester. Nurse replied that it wasn't her custom to run after young men, and that their absence about the house to which she had referred was a deficiency for general and not for personal application.

"D'you suppose if there *was* a man about she be looking so miserable?" Nurse asked.

"She" was, of course, their employer.

But Cook, who was engaged to the gar-

dener, and desired no changes, "didn't know, she was sure."

But Nurse was persuaded "she'd marry again. At her age, with her looks, and her money—all her own to use as she liked—she was bound to take up with some one."

"Who is there?" wondered Cook.

"No one yet," replied Nurse, "but you mark my words, there will be."

"Did you know she was friends with that Mrs. Galbraith?" asked Cook.

"No, who's she?"

"The rich widow over at Bletchford."

"Seems to me they're all widows here but you," said Nurse.

"Mrs. Galbraith's something else," said Cook. "She invented a new religion. It cured little Bessie Quain over at Righton, they say. She's a Christian something. Whatever it is, the Vicar says there is no harm in it, and that it's a capital thing for

hysterics. John doesn't think much of it, though."

John, Cook's future husband, at that moment was busy in the spinach-bed.

But Nurse doubted whether there was any room for a new religion, and added that so far as she knew, Mrs. Lee, like her father, had none.

"Ah, that's why Mrs. Galbraith's made a set at her!" said Cook. "She'll convert her."

"She won't find that an easy job when Mr. Selby's here," Nurse answered. "He's what they call sarcastic. You never know when he's poking fun at you. You'll have a nice time with him, I can tell you. If the bacon at breakfast isn't to his liking, down it comes again! He never minds what trouble he puts you to, and if he gives you a couple of shillings he fancies he's behaved handsomely."

Cook's face fell at the prospect, but here the nursery bell interrupted the interview.

At six o'clock the rumble of wheels was heard in the main road, and a station fly appeared. On it was John Selby's portmanteau; in it Selby, in a new gray suit, his thick white hair and straight, handsome features half hidden under a Homburg hat.

Selby had reduced the play of his emotions to the vanishing point. But for keen sense of cynical humor he would have superficially resembled a stage aristocrat preserved in ice from the mid-Victorian stage.

He descended from the fly, presented a most carefully shaved and quite unhurried cheek to his daughter, and observed that he should only want a cup of fresh tea and a bath before dinner.

Then, having paid the driver a fare which a bargain had reduced to the minimum, he proceeded to inspect his daughter's home.

He followed her critically from room to room; disapproved of the smell of furniture polish in the hall, "which only barbarous slat-

terns ever applied to oak," suggested changes in the furniture of the guest chamber which required the presence of John, fetched from the spinach-bed, to complete, and finally graciously accepted the general comfort of the Red House as adequate to himself, but as more than ample for his daughter's requirements.

"It is," he said, "an admirable home for a widow naturally seeking seclusion. You have complete quiet, the cleanest and freshest air. What more can one want? You are just far enough from the sea not to be annoyed by it, and near enough to the station to be in touch with things. Which of your neighbors have called on you?"

"Only the vicar and Mrs. Galbraith. I dare say you remember her," replied Octavia.

"Yes, of course," said her father. "Let me see. Isn't she a widow? Ladies victims of a similar bereavement are naturally

brought together. But I fancy there's something odd about her religion. I have an idea that she has been taken in by some Yankee experiment on human credulity. So long as it has nothing to do with Mormonism, what it is doesn't much matter, but new faiths naturally turn to polygamy."

"Only when invented by men," replied his daughter.

"Is that so? Well, I admit I haven't studied the question carefully. Mrs. Galbraith's place at Bletchford was rather a fine one, I remember, and unless her new brand of religion is peculiarly offensive, no doubt you will be able to tolerate it with equanimity."

"She is a disciple of Eustace Fenner," said Octavia, who had saved this information till last.

"Poor dear woman, what a pity!" exclaimed John Selby.

"Why?"

"Because he'll either end in marrying her

or getting her money. It is the fate of disciples when they are—widows.”

But Mr. Selby finished his tea, stepped out into the garden, picked the first rosebud, and offered it to himself to decorate his dinner jacket.

On the whole he was satisfied with his dinner, but sent out to the kitchen elaborate directions on the subject of the preparation of toast for his early tea.

Flabby toast with morning tea was, he said, a crime in housekeeping.

CHAPTER IV

THE delicate sense of solitude characteristic of the Red House was dispelled by the presence of John Selby's worldliness. He was so acutely modern, in spite of his sixty years, that when his neat, shining boots trampled on the shadows they lost their mystery. His imperturbable selfishness stiffened the dreamy routine of his daughter's house into nervous alertness.

"I told you the sort of man he was," said Nurse to Cook.

A widower for twenty years, ever since the Government, in a fit of misplaced enterprise, purchased his now obsolete "Selby Fuse," Selby had done nothing but gratify his own whims and increase his altruistic cynicism. When Octavia looked back to her childhood she saw little else but a long vision of foreign

schoolrooms. On her mother's death she had succeeded to a few hundreds a year, out of which during her minority her father had scrupulously paid for her education on the plea that nothing was more stimulating to a girl's character than the sense of independence. "I should not like," he said, "a daughter of mine to feel she was a burden on her father's resources and a domestic parasite." With such views on the relations of parents and children John Selby welcomed Octavia's early marriage with an eagerness which would have done credit to a mother with ten undowered daughters to provide for.

Yet Selby was not unpopular, especially among the younger men who could appreciate his acrid humor. His massive selfishness rather resembled instinct than any possibly eradicable defect of nature. His daughter accepted it as a matter of course—as one accepts some physical blemish, such as short sight or irregular teeth.

Of his daughter he was in a manner fond. He had been heard to boast that, in all her life, she had never caused him a moment's uneasiness. This was quite true. As a prosperous widow she certainly added now to the convenience of his life, and whenever he imagined that he saw his own harsher features reflected in her charming profile, he cordially admired her beauty.

On his way down Selby had told himself that a man's first visit to a widowed daughter from whom he had been long separated should be rich in surprises. For the first he was ill prepared. He discovered that for the art of being a grandfather he had no natural taste. That it might be acquired did not occur to a mind completely content with its own virtues.

Two novel forces coming into contact frequently jar. Edith as a grandchild was as modern a type as Selby for a grandfather. They suspected each other from the outset.

He grated on the child's nerves as an old gentleman who did not laugh when she "was funny," nor listen when she wished to speak—offenses the young of to-day with difficulty overlook.

On the other hand, Octavia's extreme indulgence irritated him. She actually allowed the child to ask idle questions, to which she tried to return serious answers. On the afternoon of the third day of his visit, when this actually interfered with his reading of the *Times*, Mr. Selby felt it his duty to expostulate.

The beautiful weather which had tempted him from London continued, and the child's chatter disturbed the complete peace of the garden. Mr. Selby had come down for rest, and rest he intended to have. It is true he had not done a day's work since the War Office purchased his time fuse, but perhaps, as a consequence of that, perfect repose seemed all the more essential to his comfort.

“Mummy!” Edith was saying for the third time, “why are buttercups yellow and daisies white?”—a question which Octavia had twice denied her power to answer.

At the third repetition of it John Selby rose abruptly from his chair, his eye having detected an equally comfortable seat at a remoter corner of the garden, and said: “My dear 'Tavia, you are making a perfect idiot of that child. Had I spoiled you as you are spoiling her, do you imagine that you would ever have grown to be a rational woman?”

Octavia winced. Her thoughts flew back twelve years to her attack of scarlet fever. “Certainly,” she replied, “you never did spoil me!”

“Then he ought to have!” exclaimed Edith defiantly, to whom “spoil” was synonymous with “cherish”; “all nice children must be spoiled.”

“There is no fault so odious as selfishness,” resumed her grandfather. “Your daughter

only thinks of herself. Pray, Octavia, be warned in time."

So saying he marched off to a pleasant, cushioned garden-chair under a chestnut tree.

"There, Edith," said her mother, mildly endeavoring to rebuke her defiant daughter, "you have driven your grandfather away!"

"I don't care," repeated Edith indignantly; "I don't care; he's a cross old man."

Octavia was endeavoring to bring Edith to a keener sense of filial piety when Mrs. Galbraith's shining chestnuts dashed into the narrow drive, filling it with splendor.

Beside Mrs. Galbraith sat a gentleman whose handsome face Octavia had last seen at Simla. It was her husband's old school-fellow and comrade, Raymond King.

The memories associated with him crowded fast in her mind. At her marriage he had been her husband's "best man." The pretty pearl ear-rings which she was wearing had been his wedding gift. In India, she remem-

bered, they had teased her for his "devotion."

Once more the chatter and idle rumors of an Indian Hill station buzzed in her ears. How strange to meet in May-time, here under English trees, the friend who had been part of the pleasant soldiering life under hot Indian skies!

As the carriage approached, Mrs. Galbraith's clear face, serene and mild, seemed to say: "See whom I have brought to cheer you in your solitude!"

For the evangelist of the New Christians did not work at random. Delicate diplomacy would, she thought, be needed to reconcile Octavia Lee to the elegant fold.

It chanced the day after her meeting with Octavia in the churchyard that Major King took Mrs. Galbraith in to dinner at a party at Olchester. Octavia, the friend of both, had been the point of meeting for their sympathies.

“Fancy, Mrs. Lee being at the Red House!” exclaimed Major King. “I heard that she was afraid to live there, and intended to let the place. When I last heard of her she was at Florence. The poor girl simply adored her husband, who was my oldest friend and as gallant a soldier as enteric ever killed.”

“But surely you would like to see her again?” said Mrs. Galbraith.

“Ever so much,” he replied; “only, you see, it might worry her. She was so devoted to Lee.”

“It would cheer her, poor soul,” replied Mrs. Galbraith, “and she wants it. Come and lunch with me on Wednesday, and I will drive you over.”

“Thank you, I’ll come,” said the Major thoughtfully.

“He might help,” reflected Mrs. Galbraith.

He seemed an able, handsome, active soldier, a little too much outside “movements,”

perhaps. He had never heard of the New Christians; long absence from home on foreign service was his excuse; but he was evidently a "man."

They spoke of John Selby. The Major remembered that Hubert Lee used to tell the oddest stories of his father-in-law. As a gunner, the Major considered the Government had got a very bad bargain in the old fellow's fuse.

"I'm afraid he's a dreadfully selfish man," said Mrs. Galbraith tentatively.

"A perfect terror!" replied the Major. "He's on the committee of one of my clubs, and rather a useful man, too; but he leads the other fellows such a dance that they're afraid of him. Rather a dismal sort of father for such a woman as Octavia Lee!"

Major King spoke with feeling.

"Do you think he is fond of her?" asked Mrs. Galbraith.

"He must be proud of her."

At this Mrs. Galbraith, now sure the Major could help her, began to plan and build as was her wont. She did not actually say to herself, "If Octavia cannot console herself with the New Christianity, perhaps she may find comfort in her friendship with Major King and its possible consequences," yet something vaguely resembling this idea was already at the back of her mind. When, therefore, Mrs. Galbraith beheld Octavia warmly welcoming Major King on her own lawn, she experienced the satisfaction common to all amiable interveners in the affairs of others.

"You must thank me, Octavia," she said smilingly, "for unearthing your old friend."

"Oh, I do!" exclaimed Octavia. "I thought you were in Egypt, Major King."

Edith, standing beside her mother, looked up at a face dimly remembered.

"So I was three weeks ago," answered the Major. "But they've sent me down here to

look after the new defenses over at Fort Righton. I dare say you remember I'm a gunner, Mrs. Lee?"

He was so visibly pleased to see her again.

"We remember everything, don't we, Edith?" said Octavia, smiling.

The Major beamed at the child.

"You don't remember me in India, Edith?" said he.

"I do," said the child.

"Why, you weren't three!"

"Just three," corrected Octavia.

"I do, positively," said the child proudly.

"We called you Uncle Raymond, 'cause I hadn't an uncle."

The swift rush back of the child's memory touched them.

"A young memory is a box of pretty surprises," murmured Mrs. Galbraith.

But John Selby joined the group; the talk for a while was general. He remembered Mrs. Galbraith before (as he thought) the

New Christians had been invented. Her appearance seemed to belie her creed. So far as he knew she was the first member of the eccentric Church whom he had seen. He had expected a sort of upper-class Salvationist—certainly nothing resembling “this admirably turned-out woman.” Selby maintained, he thought, and cherished as a proof of a youthfulness which years cannot sap, a young man’s eye for women. As a judge of their dress and breeding he deemed his knowledge supreme.

“If I had not been a man of science,” he once told his daughter, “I could easily have become a more effective designer of costumes than Worth or Paquin”—for the names of the big milliners frequently decorated his talk with ladies.

He observed that Mrs. Galbraith’s clothes were perfect in cut, color, and taste. “She looks like a smart Madonna!” he said to himself. The correct smartness of her carriage,

moreover, had impressed a mind penetrable by such an argument. It was, he cynically reflected, pleasing to discover that the New Christians had, to the outward eye, none of the disqualifications of the old. Mrs. Galbraith's clothes protected her from Mr. Selby's contempt. Her distinguished air was an excuse for "her new-fangled religion." Had she been his intellectual sister in doubt he could not have handed her tea and cake with greater gallantry. It was true he observed that the cake was neither suited for human food nor pleasant to look at, but then he explained that Octavia was "keeping on" the late Miss Lee's cook, and he for one was prepared to risk indigestion rather than harass the Red House with drastic domestic reforms.

While Selby was entertaining (as he supposed) Mrs. Galbraith by the lightness of his conversational touch, but without reaching, as his curiosity hoped, the "New Christian"

in her, Major King, Octavia, and Edith were wandering through the garden. The Major remembered when the big branch from the tulip tree was blown down—it was the year the shutters were painted white. They were green now—he preferred green: the whole scheme of the place—excepting, of course, the red brick—ought to be green, he thought.

Probably a handsome, amiable bachelor of thirty rarely gossips in unruffled candor with a friendly woman without causing her to wonder why he was never married. Perhaps Major King's manner to Edith suggested in his case the train of thought to his companion. Octavia remembered him saying, "Soldiers oughtn't to marry," but Hubert had said so too. Why, if only Mrs. Galbraith were a few years younger Raymond King might marry her!

Then she glanced across the lawn toward her father and Mrs. Galbraith. It was odd people from such remote poles of feeling

should find so much to say. Her father's manner seemed changed. Apparently he no longer remembered that the day before he had in anticipation derided Mrs. Galbraith as "the victim of a ridiculous and vulgar craze."

"He expected a dusty, middle-aged woman in a poke bonnet, with a reticule full of tracts!" thought Octavia.

As she glanced towards them she slightly smiled.

"A most fascinating woman, Mrs. Galbraith," said Raymond King, following her glance, and by chance interpreting its meaning; "but not the least what one expects in a new religionist, you know."

"So my father evidently feels," she answered. "But the New Christians endeavor to be as nice as they possibly can in every way—dress and everything."

"Certainly Mrs. Galbraith succeeds," replied the Major thoughtfully. "But I never did see why beauty and godliness should

endeavor to be dissociated. Do you like her?"

"I am beginning quite to love her," replied Octavia. "She is so good that she absolutely feels good! Did you ever see so peaceful a face?"

They looked across at them again through the branches. Selby was listening; Mrs. Galbraith was speaking earnestly.

"But wouldn't she be just as nice if she weren't a New Christian?" suggested the Major.

"You mean her charm is perfectly natural?"

"Yes, I suppose I do. All the same, if I broke my leg I'm afraid I should prefer a doctor to cure it."

"But suppose it were a broken heart?" said she, smiling, but half in earnest.

"In that case Mrs. Galbraith's sympathy would be invaluable," said he, smiling too.

Suddenly Selby, from his side of the garden, called "Octavia!"

They crossed the lawn at the summons.

"Mrs. Galbraith," said Raymond King, "has talked your father into something. She always gets what she wants--as she ought to. It isn't easy for a sinner to say 'No' to a saint."

Mrs. Galbraith sat back in her chair, smiling quietly. She had succeeded in her object.

"Tavia," Selby commenced, in his most generous manner, "Mrs. Galbraith wants you and Edith to stay with her in London. You need a change."

A few weeks earlier it was a change to the Red House that Octavia had needed, in her father's opinion! She looked at him in wonder, and saw Mrs. Galbraith's hand behind the change.

"But what will *you* do?" she asked.

"Who? I? It doesn't matter about me,

but I'll get my old friend Burke to stay with me. He shall bring down his man, who can cook. He and I will make a bachelor's establishment of the place for a couple of weeks. Your lady in the kitchen might have a holiday, 'Tavia."

"You *will* come, Octavia, dear?" pleaded Mrs. Galbraith.

"I should love to!" exclaimed Octavia, touched by the affectionate thrill in the other's voice.

"And London's so jolly just now," said the Major, who was taking leave next week, and intended to spend it in town.

Then at a sign the carriage drove up—the horses, waiting in the shade, had been tossing bright bits—and with a kiss to Octavia and Edith, and a gracious smile to Selby, Mrs. Galbraith drove off with the Major, feeling her net of love and pity folding round a wandering soul.

When the sound of wheels was heard no

more, Selby turned to his daughter and exclaimed—

“A most charming woman, and fitted to her opulent setting.”

Then he remained silent a moment, counting the years since his wife's death. They numbered twenty-three, yet he had never thought of marrying again. He was sixty-three, but felt younger. He threw back his head to prove it, and resumed—

“And then her taste—why, it's as good as mine! The Sermon on the Mount never harmed a woman yet. No, 'Tavia, you couldn't refuse—it would have been too selfish! I'll go in and ask Burke to come—that is if he can bring his cook.”

CHAPTER V

ON the second morning of her visit to Mrs. Galbraith's, Octavia awoke and surveyed her impressions—at first through the haze of sleep, but soon in the broad light of wakefulness.

The clear sky was full of sunshine and fresh, balmy airs. Through the parted blinds of her high windows she looked over the trees of the gardens on the gently rippled waters of the Serpentine basking in the setting of tall trees.

Under the roll of the early traffic she heard the rustle of leaves, and was conscious of fragrance wafted from dewy lawns and flowerbeds—fragile pastoral suggestions which the vast tread of London too quickly stamps into dust.

The very feeling that she was less unhappy

now made her half remorseful, for her first waking thoughts were always for the head that had pressed the pillow next her own.

The sense that it had vanished forever had once been intolerable. To be all alone after those brief years of love! To self-pity there is no limit. Yet since her fit of weeping by the cross the weight of aching regret began to press less heavily upon her. It seemed that, having climbed to the highest crest of sorrow, she now, with many a long look back at the despairing summit, was slowly descending to the valley of comparative resignation, where the minor human discontents, checkered by cheerfulness and children's laughter, permanently abide.

The big house, north of the park and east of Lancaster Gate, which Mrs. Galbraith's fine decorative taste had robbed of the chilly, angular gauntness common to "imposing mansions" in that quarter, had received Octavia very kindly. She felt that she was in

the camp of the New Christians, but was not yet conscious where it touched her.

Her hostess was alert. Eustace Fenner's warning was unnecessary. "A suspicion of spiritual patronage," he said, "and we lose Mrs. Lee."

"Trust me," answered Mrs. Galbraith.

The words were whispered in the vestibule at the opera, while Eustace Fenner followed Octavia and Mrs. Galbraith through the bare-shouldered crowd of bejeweled women waiting for their carriages.

The meeting only seemed fortuitous, for Mrs. Galbraith was not accustomed to march her proposed converts unprepared to the comforts of Wigpole Street. *Tannhäuser* and a stall next to Eustace Fenner seemed a fitting preparation for them. Octavia loved music. There was no mood of hers to which *Tannhäuser* would not be welcome. For four years her heart had been singing its silent hymn to its own Evening Star.

"They feel alike about Wagner," Mrs. Galbraith thought.

Of course she sent Eustace his stall—"such luxuries," as he was not too proud to admit (especially to the well-to-do), "being beyond the limits of his poor purse."

But benevolence procured him as much music as he wanted, and during the season his musical admirers might trace to an operatic basis many of the most striking figures of speech in his eloquent addresses.

To Octavia, at their first meeting, he presented himself as a gentle-mannered dilettante, but for a reticent stream of poetry scarcely distinguishable from a clever man of the world.

She saw no dangerous side to him, and was unable to accept him at her father's harsh estimate, "as the leader in an hysterical movement, which, if the men didn't take care, would end in swamping society with the cant and jargon of a nonsensical creed."

But Octavia remembered that her father's sweeping indictment had been made before he met Mrs. Galbraith.

"How odd," she reflected, "that he should cease to denounce the New Christians as absolutely ridiculous the moment he discovered Mrs. Galbraith was a woman of taste!"

Octavia glanced round her pleasant room. The servant had just brought morning tea, the silken curtains stirred luxuriously in the soft breeze, cheerful lights bathed the soft decorations.

A clock struck eight; in the garden separating the house from the road, where the early omnibuses were rolling eastward, a thrush began to sing. Octavia gazed through the blinds. The bridge over the Serpentine ended her clear picture; beyond, in the faint haze, towers and spires floated shadowy as the pinnacles of a phantom city. It was London behind the silver romance of early morning, in its setting of trees, beautiful in its

spectral distances, ominous in its inarticulate murmurings.

In a dream-like pageant past impressions moved across her mind. She stood on the veranda of her Indian home in the Hills, looking across the plain lying blue and mysterious before her, waiting for her husband's return from morning parade; or gazed down on Florence from the villa near Fiesole, where, under the Italian skies, she had first tried to fight her sorrows.

Since her husband's death she always seemed to be seeking what she never found.

But as she mused before her window, her white clothing shining in the clear light, her long, chestnut hair loose and the music of *Tannhäuser* still sounding in her brain, her maid entered the room in visible anxiety, and said that "Miss Edith was not at all well."

Octavia, in anxious silence, accompanied the maid to Edith's room, which was next her own.

She found the child restless, distressed, and leadened-eyed under the crushing weight of headache.

They stood by the bed. At the sound of her own name and her mother's anxious voice the child stirred petulantly.

"Go away, mummy; don't bother!"

The doubts rushed through Octavia's mind as her cool hand detected fever. She caught up *Diseases of the Nursery*, only to discover that the symptoms might point to anything from typhus at one end of the scale of panic to congestion of the brain at the other.

Had the child eaten anything unwholesome, or, worse still, "caught something coming up to town"?

"There was the Convalescent Home at Port Righton, where all manner of invalids were sent," suggested the maid, an alarmist. For a moment Octavia's mind fed on its own fears.

"Go and ask Mrs. Galbraith to be kind

enough to send for a doctor," she said at last.

The maid left the room. Edith tossed restlessly on her pillows; her mother watched by the bed hearing the clock tick, until Mrs. Galbraith, immaculate in a green linen dress which matched in color the young lilac leaves basking in the morning sun without, quietly entered the room. As she kissed Octavia her calm, reassuring eyes seemed to spread peace about them.

"Edith unwell?" she asked.

"Nearly three degrees of fever!" replied Octavia, still holding the clinical thermometer in her hand.

Mrs. Galbraith touched Edith's head, then crossed to the window recess where Octavia had moved.

"You *will* send for a doctor?" whispered Octavia.

"Why should we? She will be well before he arrives. Leave her to me. Go and have

your bath. When you are dressed Edith will be well, or nearly well." She spoke with conviction.

"But if she isn't, you will send?" urged Octavia.

"Yes. But do sit down and let me tie up your hair. I feel I must."

Octavia yielded.

In two turns of Mrs. Galbraith's fingers the shining chestnut locks clung in a coil to the young woman's graceful neck.

Octavia felt her anxiety lessening. The voices of panic were silent.

"There!" said Mrs. Galbraith, as she put in the last hairpin.

"She does seem easier," murmured Octavia, glancing toward the bed.

"Can't you trust me?" said Mrs. Galbraith.

"Yes; but you know I can't believe——"

"Hush! hush!" interposed Mrs. Galbraith, "and leave Edith to me."

“Yes, you can go, mummy,” said the child, who had been watching and listening from her pillow. Then with a glance back at the child’s flushed face, Octavia left the room. In the passage her maid was talking with Mrs. Galbraith’s.

“She’s a wonderful healer!” the latter was saying. “We never want doctors here!”

Octavia hurried through her toilet, still vexed by doubts. Was she doing right? Might not the child be sickening for a fever? She heard, moreover, her father’s voice mocking “the hocus-pocus of these medicine women.” But her friend’s serene face, with the Madonna-like sense of protection behind the kind gaze, soothed the fears as they rose, and when, half an hour later, Octavia, full of strange curiosity, re-entered Edith’s room and found the child lying quietly back on her pillow, her anxieties had passed.

“She’s been telling me a story, mummy!” said Edith.

Mrs. Galbraith smiled.

"Have half an hour's sleep, darling," she said, "then, if mummy likes, you shall get up."

The child turned round obediently.

"Now, Octavia, we will go to breakfast," said Mrs. Galbraith.

Octavia followed her from the room.

"Is she well?" she asked.

"She will be in half an hour. Children are the metaphysician's easiest cases."

In any other woman, and perhaps even in Mrs. Galbraith at some other time, Octavia would have resented this phrase. She knew that the New Christians believed, or tried to believe, that power to heal sickness is attainable by those who have cast out all moral evil from their hearts. She was persuaded, too, that Mrs. Galbraith's charm sprang from the purity and goodness on which it was based; but although she loved her for it, she was none the less incapable, by teaching and tem-

perament, of attributing the sudden recovery of Edith to her friend's spiritual intervention. Her gratitude, therefore, assumed no more vivid shape than mild thanks.

It was so kind of Mrs. Galbraith to cheer up little Edith—the child evidently was less robust and more nervous than she seemed.

During breakfast they talked of the opera, of Eustace Fenner's wide taste in music, of anything that was remote to spiritual claims and healing by faith.

Mrs. Galbraith had business at the church at Wiggpole Street. The morning was therefore Octavia's own, but her mind was disturbed, because the practical side of her character resented mysteries, and mysteries seemed fluttering all over the pleasant, opulent house.

Of Mrs. Galbraith's sway over others, of her powers of soothing, there was no doubt; but from that to the working of miracles? In spite of the clinical thermometer Edith could

not have been ill. But the child was Octavia's most precious and adorable possession, and, at a touch of Mrs. Galbraith's hand, all the mother's anxieties had been dispelled. Was it Nature, or Mrs. Galbraith's "metaphysics"?

Octavia, returning to Edith's room, found her sleeping peacefully, and sat with her till the child awoke, quite cool and well.

Then, stretching her pretty, slender arms and smiling placidly, Edith said—

"Now I'll get up, mummy."

"Do rest a little longer," pleaded Octavia, still watching for "symptoms." But Edith resolutely flung off the bedclothes. What was the good of it? She was all right. Mrs. Galbraith had said so.

So Edith had her way, and was dressed. Already her indisposition was forgotten; some doll-comedy—two flaxen-wigged wonders sat up in a chair witching her—filled her thoughts. Even Octavia's anxiety could not

detect a single "symptom" outstanding from the morning's alarm.

"What did Mrs. Galbraith do to make you well?" she inquired.

"Told me I was well," said the child indifferently, "so I got well."

"Don't you feel ill?"

"Had bad dreams—that's all."

The subject evidently bored a childish fancy running riot in the kingdom of make-believe, far from all ailments.

Edith's sudden recovery brought Octavia into contact with an element which she had not yet detected in the house.

Descending the stairs a little later, she passed Louise, Mrs. Galbraith's maid.

"We knew we should see Miss Edith down," she said, glancing after the child, who marched on encumbered with her dolls, "the moment Mrs. Galbraith undertook the case. She is a wonderful healer! When I get one of my worst headaches I just think of her,

and away it goes! I used to be anæmic till she cured me!"

"You mean till you got well," said Octavia, slightly annoyed.

"No, ma'am. I mean she made me well," came the reply, with its undercurrent of defiance.

"You are all New Christians here, then?" said Octavia.

"All except the footman, who is still unconverted, ma'am."

Quick to read signs, Octavia now felt that the atmosphere was impregnated by a subtle sense of spiritual superiority, generated by those who breathed it. The New Christians were sorry for her. She felt that Edith's "cure" was expected to shake her own unfaith to its pitiful foundation in ignorance. Beliefs which seemed blameless when tenderly handled by Mrs. Galbraith became offensive the moment they touched vulgar minds.

Octavia's maid, Parkes, deeply impressed by the mysteries moving round her, was still hesitating to enter the magic circle. The new creed seemed so very pleasant! As she understood it, you could make it do what you liked. It would keep you well and keep you young, and, no doubt, "keep your young man true." It appealed to her imagination as an elegant blend between a love-philter and a universal remedy. In fact, Parkes was rapidly undergoing the process of conversion, and hoped her mistress would "take to it too." Still, she "knew her place" and kept her thoughts to herself till Octavia took counsel with her and said—

"Parkes, please don't let Miss Edith be worried with any of these new fads."

"Oh, ma'am," exclaimed the maid, "they can't hurt any one!"

"Superstition always does harm," replied the resolute Octavia.

At this Parkes felt it her duty to protest

respectfully but insidiously. Mrs. Galbraith's maid had told her how Mrs. Galbraith had cured a little girl who was always catching cold by teaching her that catarrhs were non-existent. "She believes she can't catch cold, and so she never does," Parkes explained, "though weak on the chest and fond of getting wet feet."

Octavia, on the point of saying "Nonsense," checked herself.

Looking thus through the eyes of her maid she began to feel that she was merely a moral case under treatment.

"And just think, ma'am," resumed Parkes, "what Mrs. Galbraith did for Miss Edith! I was quite alarmed this morning, as you know."

"Edith had an attack of indigestion; we had a panic, and Mrs. Galbraith soothed us all. There's nothing wonderful in that," answered Octavia.

But Parkes, now chin-deep in attractive

speculations, allowed the discussion to drop, not because she was convinced, but because "it was not her place to argue."

"You won't do much with her," she said to Louise; "she's most obstinate."

"Wait till Mr. Fenner gets at her," Louise replied, "then you'll see!"

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Mrs. Galbraith consulted Eustace Fenner she admitted her disappointment. Her successful treatment of little Edith had in no way visibly affected Octavia's faith. Was the woman with whom she had knelt at the foot of her cross, and whose sorrow she had soothed, hardening her heart?

"Octavia Lee," she said, "escapes from the shadow of spiritual things. I feel that I am making no progress."

"The daughter of a virulent agnostic," Eustace replied, "may have ancestral taints in her character, beautiful and attractive though it seem."

Then—and the emotion was hardly a religious one—he closed his eyes and recalled Octavia's charming profile against a swelling orchestral background of *Tannhäuser*. He had never felt so interested in a case before.

Mrs. Lee was something more than a mere soul to be saved from raging seas of doubt; she was a beautiful young woman just emerging from—from——?

But although Eustace did not follow the thought to any definite verbal issue, he resented the too prolonged sorrow of a most alluring young woman for her lost husband. Was not love—especially woman's love—for the living? Otherwise would it have been given us? For when it suited Eustace his views were of the simplest.

But Eustace, who guessed what was working in Mrs. Galbraith's mind, considered Octavia's case far better suited to his subtler treatment than her own more obvious methods. He was even faintly jealous that he had not been requested to undertake the intricate but pleasing task.

"The matter," he said in his spiritually judicial manner, "stands thus: If Octavia Lee is morally incapable of becoming one of Us,

the only chance of restoring her to worldly harmony must be sought in a suitable marriage. But for a soul so delicately poised, can any marriage be suitable?" Here Eustace hesitated a moment and added, "I mean in the world to which she belongs."

For a new trouble was already vexing his mind. Would not Octavia Lee, with her fortune and beauty, her lovely, slender fingers, her dark gray eyes, her wistful lips, be far more adorable as the spouse of a man of spiritual insight than as the wife of some well-bred, self-indulgent man of the world?

He pursued this thought for a moment in silence, and continued—

"But I am speaking to-night; perhaps you might induce Mrs. Lee to hear me. I doubt I can effect much, but one never knows."

"One never does," assented Mrs. Galbraith. "There are minds incapable of grasping the Higher Thought; but Octavia is so full of winning lights and shades, and almost

aching for human affection. I will bring her if I can. But remember how ill-prepared she is."

"I will be on my guard," he replied, for one so gentle, almost testily. "I am not accustomed to fling truths about like patent pills. It was not I who said that theology and medicine were one and the same."

This crude announcement had in fact been made on Eustace's own platform by an American lecturer in a zealous endeavor to popularize the subtleties of their creed. Eustace objected to such addresses on the ground that there was danger in the familiar treatment of delicate, intricate truths. In the present instance, however, he had been overruled. The lecture was given, and was followed by a somewhat unseemly wrangle, which would have become acrimonious had not Eustace Fenner, coming to the rescue, explained that "since Harmony was the Truth of Being, the feasibility of disease necessarily

disappeared under the New Christian revelation."

This elegant sublimate of the lecturer's raw formula created an immediate calm. It was felt that the subject had been raised to a worthy level in the comforting twilight of mystery where shape is lost.

For Eustace Fenner's power lay among the cloudy phrases which fill the blank and vacant spaces in many a pious brain. Scoffers who heard him maintained that the one thing needful for the complete triumph of the New Christians was a language to which absolutely no human meaning could be attached. Such a language, they maintained, Mr. Fenner seemed on the eve of inventing. But faith is impervious to ridicule, and in all ages, in some form or other, "that blessed word 'Mesopotamia'" has swayed emotional minds. The intensity which Eustace could throw into the word "Harmony" had itself the weight of a revelation for many.

But as soon as he had yielded to the slight outbreak of petulance provoked by the memory of a rival lecturer and his cruder system, Eustace repented, and added that it was not for him to cavil at methods other than his own.

“My dear Eustace,” replied the gentle Mrs. Galbraith, perceiving she had jarred on the amiable vanity of her colleague, “all of us know that the community of Wigpole Street is the growth of your sympathy quite as much as of your eloquence.”

This conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Miss Trullock (one of the Honorary Secretaries to the New Christian Church in Wigpole Street) with her typewriting machine, which shortly began to click at its allotted task. For the more private and serious part of the business Eustace had now a clerk, but the Honorary Secretaries insisted on undertaking all correspondence addressed to “The Wigpole Street center,” and Eustace

allotted them whatever work might safely be entrusted to their enthusiasm.

On her way to her carriage Mrs. Galbraith crossed the pillared hall, and sat a moment deep in thought, struggling to subdue her pride.

Her science, which some called divine, had left Octavia totally unimpressed. All shadow of resentment at this slight must be crushed from her mind before she saw her friend again. The great hall was full of silence, save for the murmur of a blue fly in the yellow light falling from the stained glass windows above. She sat with folded hands, communing with herself. What could be done for Octavia? "Be very tender and gentle with her," came the answer. Mrs. Galbraith formed such answers within herself, yet never regarded them as self-begotten. At last, with her serenity fully established, she stepped out into the sunshine of Wigpole Street, where her carriage was waiting.

Whilst Mrs. Galbraith was meditating on the subject of Octavia's hardness of heart, Octavia, sitting in the drawing-room overlooking the trees of the Gardens, was thinking of Mrs. Galbraith.

"If only," she reflected, "she had a sense of humor, what a perfect woman she would be!"

It was thus the two women's criticism reciprocally touched that which either deemed the latent defect of the other.

"After all," Octavia mused, "humor is often cruel and blunts the edge of pity."

When Mrs. Galbraith returned to lunch she kissed Octavia, relieved to feel all her mild resentment vanished.

"How is Edith?" she asked.

"Quite well, and wandering in Doll-land as usual," replied Octavia, touched by the kiss, and half guessing its meaning.

During luncheon Mrs. Galbraith suggested that Octavia might like to hear Mr. Fenner, who spoke that evening at Wigpole

Street. "Don't come," she said, "if you feel it would bore you; but even those who differ most widely from us admire his eloquence."

"I should like to hear him," said Octavia.

The afternoon was devoted to the claims of the world and shopping. Mrs. Galbraith had dresses to try on in Bond Street, ideas of her own—one a diaphanous black lace scheme, the other a wonderful gauze intricacy of such delicate coloring as nature sometimes chooses to protect and adorn some beautiful woodland bird.

"I am almost wicked about clothes," she confessed, "but I feel they do help me so!"

"How?" asked Octavia, fascinated by the other's unerring taste.

"By creating the sense of harmony which I feel so absolutely necessary for my comfort. Octavia, do let me help you choose a dress. Nature intended me for a dressmaker, accident made me an idle woman."

Octavia, beginning to love clothes again,

yielded to the temptation of "so many lovely patterns."

They plunged deep into the attractive problem. In the end another pretty gauze "novelty" was chosen for Octavia, just one degree less restrained in color than that for the elder woman.

"I forget everything when I'm looking at things," said Mrs. Galbraith, with compunction. "I have kept the carriage waiting an hour."

Octavia, who had forgotten too, was suddenly reminded by a stab of pain that since her husband's death this was the first time the joy of clothes had delighted her. Since their meeting at the foot of Mrs. Galbraith's cross the sharp spasms of regret that clutch at the heart and leave it numbed were becoming rarer and less acute. The moment seemed a station in the procession of her sorrows where resignation was reached.

When they were home Octavia was aston-

ished to find her father in the drawing-room, bearing himself with a youthfulness which unsympathetic observers might have described as jaunty. He wore a perfect frock-coat, a delicate tan-colored waistcoat, faultless striped trousers, and the new-shaped, double-folded collar at that moment in vogue among smart undergraduates. Perhaps it was the youthful collar, perhaps the element of gallantry in his manner, that rejected the reproach of sixty years.

He knew they would be surprised to see him, he said, but his friend Burke was unable to come down to the Red House, so he had run up to town that morning to arrange a few things.

The fact was, John Selby had made up his mind that Mrs. Galbraith was a very handsome woman of forty, with a fortune in danger of being squandered on distracting religious experiments and adventurers such as Eustace Fenner. Since his daughter left he

had thought the matter out carefully. Mrs. Galbraith's manner was admirable—calm, restful, dignified, simple; and, as for her craze, that would cure itself—even if he couldn't.

As he talked in his airiest and most amiable manner, with fatherly touches thrown in as suitable decorations, he studied her with a sense of secret complacence. This was no full-blown beauty clinging to youth with the reckless assistance of unblushing artifice, but a woman with the calm serenity of an unworried Madonna, wearing her years as bravely as he wore his, and with a taste and tact—well, equal to his own.

Mrs. Galbraith was unsuspectingly gracious and hospitable. If they had only known he was coming to town, they might have gone to the opera—for which Selby had assumed a discriminating enthusiasm; but at eight o'clock they were due in Wiggpole Street to hear Mr. Fenner, who was speaking that night.

But even "the impostor," as Selby in his perfectly natural moments called Eustace, could not frighten him away. You must, he remembered, swallow the fads of wealthy friends—in the case of a woman the dose taken may even be excessive without loss of dignity.

"Eustace Fenner!" he exclaimed, "he is just the man I want to hear. The pupil of Darwin and Huxley—it was my privilege to know them both—I am not so bound to their teaching that all healthy curiosity in other directions is destroyed, and I hope, my dear Mrs. Galbraith, that you will permit me to accompany you."

But this was too much even for the dutiful Octavia, who somewhere under his manner detected the latent mockery.

"What an extraordinary thing for you to do!" she exclaimed.

"My dear Tavia," protested Selby, "why extraordinary, unless you are afraid Mr. Fenner will make a convert of me?"

“Stranger things than that have happened, Mr. Selby,” said Mrs. Galbraith. “But come, by all means. Half the ridiculè flung at us is the outcome of pure ignorance.”

“It’s a favorite trick in controversy to invent your opponent’s attitude, and then deride it,” said Selby in his best philosophical manner.

“You will at least see that the New Christians bear no resemblance to the vulgar travesty of them common in the newspapers,” said Mrs. Galbraith.

“Ah, of that I’m sure,” said Selby, conscious that his daughter was closely watching him. She saw that he had touched Mrs. Galbraith on the weak point. What could his motive be? The idea which presented itself as the natural explanation of his sudden interest in her friend she dismissed from her mind as absurd.

Meanwhile Selby’s intelligently assumed want of knowledge, unaccompanied by preju-

dice, was visibly impressing Mrs. Galbraith. He admitted that he had at first thought lightly of the New Faith as some vague offshoot of Spiritualism or Theosophy. No doubt he was mistaken, and Theosophy, as Mrs. Galbraith pointed out, was a corruption of Judaism. There had been so many odd pseudo-religious movements that the world was naturally skeptical as to the vitality of any new experiment—if she would pardon him for the word. The New Christian claim that disease was unreal appeared to him an assumption difficult of proof, but the conviction of its non-existence might well act as a prophylactic on those who held it. And so he talked round the new creed with the air of respect that finally aroused Mrs. Galbraith's deeper interest. Suppose this hardened man of the world, this cynic, saturated with selfish agnosticism, were suddenly to see the luminous truth which she felt enwrapping herself harmoniously as one of her own exquisite

dresses—what a triumph! Among his class little progress had been made. Eustace Fenner believed it to be impregnable to the truth; but here was a callous specimen on the eve of possible redemption. And even as she fenced with the man's cunning unbelief her sanguine faith was struggling for his little dim speck of a soul.

When her father rose from his chair to go, Octavia was relieved. Suddenly he had been presented to her under an unpleasant new aspect. She knew him for an acute and cynical derider of human beliefs, who saw a *Tartuffe* behind every profession of faith. A few days before she had heard him say that "nothing was too ridiculous for an idle woman to believe"; but now he was dallying in mock seriousness with ideas which she knew he utterly despised. What could his object be?

"You will meet us again at Wigpole Street, then," said Mrs. Galbraith, as she left the room.

But Octavia followed him to the door.

"What makes you want to come?" she asked, when they were alone on the landing.

"A philosophic, pleasant blend of gratitude and curiosity," he replied. "Mrs. Galbraith has been most kind to you, and other people's spiritual concerns naturally interest an un-biassed mind."

His ridicule jarred on her.

"Mrs. Galbraith is most unselfish and good, and I do hope that you will not pretend to be impressed by her beliefs."

"My dear Tavia," he answered, smiling, "how intolerant you are! You forget the school in which I have been trained. I'm like Terence—nothing human is alien to me. I encourage freedom of thought, even when I see it working backward. Besides; we who live in the world have our social duties. The concealment of disrespect for the ridiculous opinions of others is one of them. Remember, every fad lives just as long as its novelty

deserves; consequently our tolerance of it is of no importance. But we meet again at the temple gates—adieu!”

And Selby descended the stairs in his new part of the smiling philosopher, leaving Octavia still speculating as to the causes of the sudden change.

Mrs. Galbraith perceived Octavia’s annoyance, but without guessing the motive.

“I was surprised to find your father took such an intelligent interest in Us,” she observed.

“And so was I,” replied Octavia; “but he seems to have suddenly discovered that a certain agreement with the religious views of his friends is convenient.”

If Octavia intended this as a warning, Mrs. Galbraith boldly misinterpreted it, since most of us accept the explanation we prefer. Might not the change be due to the softening of a worldly heart—a divine result, in fact, of the massed mental effort of the New

Christians acting on the least promising agnostic soil? Truth fulfilled itself in many unexpected ways; prayers which had missed the daughter might well have kindled a glow of generous warmth in the father.

The ladies forbore further discussion, Octavia fearing of presenting her father in an ugly light, Mrs. Galbraith lest she should wound the feelings of her guest. Sympathies and affections which met in a hundred places separated at the question of belief, and each was now conscious of the division.

“How we could love each other,” mused Mrs. Galbraith regretfully an hour later, as she was arraying herself in one of her loveliest dresses for the meeting, “if we could only think the same!”

“I do hope you will not be disappointed in Eustace Fenner,” she said wistfully to Octavia as they drove to Wiggpole Street.

“I am sure I shall not,” said Octavia.

CHAPTER VII

ON the steps of the New Christian Church in Wigpole Street John Selby watched the carriages and cabs setting down their occupants. He had a keen eye for the subtleties of fashion. A religious movement which could muster so much beauty and smartness was evidently a social force to be respectfully dallied with. Here and there he fancied he discerned the haggard eyes of hysteria or the pale cheek of fanaticism; but the abundance of elegant women, the atmosphere of luxury, refinement, and wealth, the sheen of pearls, the glitter of diamonds, although all were in morning dress, had greater weight with him than any arguments. "The only fads worth respecting," he thought, "are the fads of the rich."

Judging from the appearance of Eustace Fenner's gathering congregation, the new

religion seemed as well suited to the spiritual needs of fashionable women as the Salvation Army to those of the submerged classes.

This idea, blown into his brain by a little gust of self-satisfaction, he mistook for philosophic enlightenment. "After all," he reflected, "the classes are much alike, especially at the extremities."

But Mrs. Galbraith's carriage drove up. Mrs. Galbraith was wearing another dress. He took it in, enjoyed the charm of its design and color. His daughter, he fancied, seemed rather bored; evidently she scarcely expected to be amused.

Mrs. Galbraith welcomed him with her untroubled smile. Of a temperament that descended toward peevishness, he was himself secretly comforted by serenity in others. How odd, he reflected, pleased at the novelty of the situation, that he of all men should admire a woman harnessed to a craze! And so he patted his own tolerance on the back.

As he followed Mrs. Galbraith and Octavia to front seats he was relieved to find so few men. Those who were there had either been brought—probably experimentally—by the women, or else they belonged to the cadaverous epicene fringe which clings like moth to the skirts of all emotional movements.

He was gratified to feel that, of the meager sprinkling of men, he could at least afford to despise two-thirds.

The twilight falling through the yellow top-lights was crushed by the glare of the electric light before the last-comers took their seats; the air was full of delicate scents and the rustlings of costly draperies. "What a number of beautiful hats!" whispered Selby to Mrs. Galbraith. The big room resembled an exhibition of confused millinery.

But Mrs. Galbraith made no definite reply. The silence grew tense over the congregation—Eustace Fenner stepped on the platform.

Both Selby and his daughter were disap-

pointed with a ritual destitute of ornate or novel features.

Eustace gave out a hymn, which the audience sang—a hymn which took back Selby's mind to the triumphs of Moody and Sankey, for, though the words were different, the tune was the same. Then a chapter of the New Testament was read in a clear voice by an elegant lady, the pink roses in her hat trembling the while in sympathy with her utterance. This was followed by an extract from a chapter from the volume in which is enshrined all the wisdom of the New Christians, a volume which would have made a Sibyl giddy! Eustace Fenner was the reader, and he read well, leading his listeners into the sacred but involved verbal labyrinths, where, it seemed to Selby, sense swooned into nonsense. When the reading was over and those who had tried to follow intelligently were sufficiently dazed, another hymn was sung, and then Eustace Fenner rose to address

them. The audience stirred with expectation.

Eustace had an admirable voice and great mastery of words, but whether the full significance of his address was realized by his hearers, or whether the whole of it attained to the clearness of complete meaning—a point which Selby in secret denied—he easily held the attention of the audience. Selby learned, however, that the first essential for conversion was “a perfectly honest and sincere mind,” and was not astonished to hear that, among the doubters, the hygienic claims of the New Christian teaching was the quality attracting most interest. “It is our claim to cure the sick,” said Eustace, “which has created the greatest mental confusion in students outside our Church.” At this the audience stirred expectantly, the uninitiated hoping that he was about to explain “how the thing was done.” Too wise to try, he suddenly soared aloft among the mysteries.

The phenomena of being, he pointed out, included the eternal harmony and perfection reaching the highest earthly expression in the marvelous mind of man. Here Selby wondered "what the deuce it all meant." But the speaker proceeded to elaborate the dim statement till his audience thrilled, and an unheard whisper made itself felt, which signified "How marvelously clever!"

This the orator paused a moment to enjoy, then started on another flight. As a system of metaphysics, he told them, the creed was hampered by material terms, which New Christian students explained metaphysically.

Here Selby laughed to himself, and when he was warned to beware of the sophistry of the intellect and to spiritualize his consciousness, the little mocking bubbles rose in his brain like gas in soda-water. The doctrine that "matter and evil represented the absence of spirit" he found unintelligible, perhaps because he was conscious of matter alone;

his views of human life caused him to accept with indifference the further statement that man was the strongest evidence of the divine element in nature. Still, he listened with outward respect, and an occasional half glance at Mrs. Galbraith's rapt face. She had often heard Eustace Fenner say the same things in different words, but never without a sense of moral refreshment. As incapable of understanding Selby's state of mind as he was of appreciating hers, his assumed attitude of moderate criticism encouraged her to hope that his materialism was melting under the soft warmth of Eustace Fenner's pleading.

This hope compensated for her disappointment in Octavia, whose distrust she felt still unshaken.

When Eustace approached the question of mind cures, however, Octavia's interest suddenly increased. Better health and a more spiritual religion, said Eustace, were the commonest human wants, and these the New

Christians were slowly distributing all over the world. The cult of materialism and a false system of science were the two chief obstacles against which Healers fought. Sceptics were incurable—at least in his opinion. For centuries the world had been blundering on in the dark, cut off by its own ignorance and blindness from man's natural right to perfect happiness. Sickness and death were the result of sin and error, and not of the laws of matter, miscalled the laws of nature.

Then, in the words of the founder of the system, he declared that the new creed was able "to bring to the body the sunlight of Truth, to change the secretions, expel humors, dissolve tumors, relax rigid muscles, and restore carious bones to soundness."

There was, in fact, no evil which the perfect mind might not cure. And all the while John Selby sat stroking his chin in secret mockery. This is what he thought:—

“After all, this sort of craze can’t do a woman capable of believing it much harm.”

At the end of a poetical peroration Eustace sat down, his long hair falling over his white fingers in silent prayer. This pious pause having ended, the lady in the pretty hat who had read the lesson rose and said that they should be pleased to hear any testimony of mind-curing. The congregation rustled. A pretty girl of twenty stood up nervously and told them how a friend had fallen from a bicycle and apparently dislocated her hip-joint; she had treated her silently, however, and on the following day her friend, save for a bruise extending from hip to shoulder, was well. Others followed with similar experiences; dyspepsia was reached. One lady had suffered from chronic indigestion for five years, and consulted in vain all the leading physicians of London and Berlin. An American friend, however, had introduced the New Christian Creed, and h

taken her case. After a week's treatment she had completely recovered her health, and was even able to eat cheese—a thing she had not dared touch for years. The level to which the word "cheese" reduced this cure provoked a smile among the unbelievers present.

As evidence of the hygienic efficacy of the system, the cases described did not strike Selby as weighty. Fenner, he thought, might have done better. There was a complete absence of dramatic completeness exhibited in the cures. In the organization of a new creed this omission struck him as a mistake. Still he was amused at the patient tolerance of the New Christians. Here was a faith which encouraged every one to boast of his skill as a healer, or his luck as a recoverer from disease, yet no one seemed bored when his neighbor talked about himself or of ailments shuffled off. Even the rabid gentleman who protested that "the whole thing was

merely a commonplace manifestation of animal magnetism" excited more pity than indignation. No one told him he was talking nonsense, or desired him to sit down when he lost his way in the heated windings of his own unreason.

His rambling speech, however, served as a hint to the lady in the pretty hat who occupied the platform. A hymn was sung, the congregation separated, a few lingered in groups at the entrance to discuss Mr. Fenner's address, but most of them hurried home with an excellent appetite for a dinner unusually late.

Selby saw his daughter and Mrs. Galbraith to the carriage. The service had affected him, he confessed, in many ways. Of Mr. Fenner's eloquence there could be no doubt, nor of the sincerity of the greater part of his congregation. The evidence offered was not of an absolutely convincing character, but undoubtedly the speakers believed in their

own cures. The dogma set forth—if it were a dogma—that skeptics were incurable he considered reasonable.

But here Mrs. Galbraith stopped.

“That,” she said, “was one of Mr. Fenner’s opinions with which she did not agree. She knew cases of skeptics who had been comforted spiritually.”

And here she thought regretfully of Octavia weeping at the foot of the cross. Octavia thought of it too, but in a different spirit.

“By vicarious effort of some sort, I presume?” said Mr. Selby in his most business-like voice.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Galbraith, as she followed Octavia into the carriage. “But won’t you come to lunch to-morrow?”

“I shall be delighted,” replied John Selby, as he watched them drive away.

“What an odd lot they are!” he reflected; “but Mrs. Galbraith’s a very fine

woman, and of extraordinary serenity of character."

Then he went to sup at his club, more persuaded than ever of the absence of common sense in the rest of the world.

CHAPTER VIII

SELBY found Eustace Fenner at Mrs. Galbraith's, and accepted his presence there as a sign that the New Christians were taking him seriously.

"She'll end in trying to convert me," he thought, flattered obliquely, "or she wouldn't bring her High Priest on the scene."

The situation appealed to him, however, chiefly on account of its humor. He tried to be polite to Eustace Fenner.

"Ah, Mr. Fenner," he said, as cordially as he could, "delighted to meet you. Although I am in the other camp, your eloquent address last night much impressed me; it did indeed."

But the other, as he shook hands, felt the cynical ice behind the greeting.

"Confound his patronage," he reflected, suspecting the prying skeptic, "he isn't really sympathetic. What's he doing here?"

Probably it was one of the rash experiments of Mrs. Galbraith, who had faith enough for anything.

But Eustace concealed his irritation under his gentle, tolerant smile, and they sat talking trifles in the pretty drawing-room, keeping clear of the mysteries, but all secretly on the watch.

Selby was conjecturing "what sort of brain that fellow Fenner really had," and wondering "how far he made the thing pay"; Octavia was rendered slightly uneasy by the sense of confusion created by the contact of such opposite temperaments as her father's and that of Eustace; Mrs Galbraith's boundless optimism was patiently hoping for signs of softening in Mr. Selby's impenetrable materialism. The conquest of such a soul would mean also a brilliant victory over the views of Mr. Fenner, to whom she said—

"We are only waiting now for Major King. I don't think you ever met him."

"Never," said Eustace, who disliked the rivalry of soldiers, and had thought the party complete.

When Octavia spoke of Major King warmly as an old friend, Eustace felt another adverse element circling about him. His vanity was pricked. As he dominated not a few women who did not attract him, so he longed to master Octavia Lee with his spiritual influence. Against such subtle artillery as his, might she not find in a dashing Horse Gunner dangerous protection?

The thought displeased him.

What was Mrs. Galbraith thinking of? Why, he wondered, was she foolish enough to parade a worldly minded soldier before a patient undergoing an unconscious mind cure? Eustace began to be afraid that Mrs. Galbraith was muddling her case. She had consulted him; he had advised her to remove Octavia Lee from her father's influence, but now he found Selby diffusing a baneful at-

mosphere of infidelity in his serene friend's drawing-room. Surely Mrs. Galbraith could not imagine that Selby could be saved? You might as well try to melt Mont Blanc with a burning-glass as warm the hardened scoffer with the comfort of the New Christians.

The more Eustace studied the movements about him the uneasier he grew. For what was Mrs. Galbraith playing? Had she already decided that the only way to restore Octavia Lee's happiness was to find her a second husband? And this before giving him even a chance of trying his own powers of conversion! The simplicity of Octavia Lee's case seemed to him completely destroyed by Mrs. Galbraith's thoughtless introduction into it of such disturbing elements as Selby and Major King. Was not this a problem with which he obviously should have been left to deal? And Eustace became conscious of a sense of resentment toward his patroness and spiritual colleague.

He had reached this point when Major King was announced, and they all went in to lunch.

The lunch was excellent, and Eustace's appetite good, but even of luncheon there could be no complete enjoyment for him in an uncongenial atmosphere. His priestly dignity felt ruffled. He suspected Selby of being a malignant spy on their mysteries, while Major King's crude observations proved he had never heard of Eustace, who was distressed to sit opposite a man who apparently regarded him in the light of a curate with a taste for conjuring.

"Those worldly people," he thought sadly, "are making me bitter! I feel almost spiteful." Yet he might have ended in absorbing himself in the simple pleasure of lunch and his furtive admiration of Octavia's beauty, but for an interruption.

A messenger brought a note from his secretary, Mr. Gardner.

"Will you excuse me?" he asked, meekly resigned, as the servant handed it to him—"it's only something from the *Torch*."

"Poor Mr. Fenner," said Mrs. Galbraith to Major King, conscious, perhaps, that the soldier had not fully grasped the importance of her friend, "they never can leave him alone!"

"That seems a pity," answered the Major, with the blundering sympathy of ignorance.

"The *Torch*, you must know, Major," interposed Selby, with the air of a man who takes no knowledge for granted, especially in a soldier, "is the organ of the New Christians."

"Quite so," said the Major vaguely, "and so I gathered—a most picturesque title, too. But, I say, what lovely flowers!"—there was a bowl full of roses in the center of the round table—"they quite beat our Indian roses, Mrs. Lee. What beauties the Commissioner grew the year we were all up at Naini Tall!"

The Major felt safer in Indian gardens than on the fringe of a new religion.

Meanwhile Eustace had read his letter, and felt himself—in consequence, it seemed, of something maleficent in the air—yielding to a temptation. Eustace was impressionable; the indifference and ignorance of the big handsome soldier, the secret contempt of the inventor of the time fuse, combined to shake his faith in himself as a religious leader.

His letter said: “Mr. Cranley has just been here, and is most anxious to see you on the old business. He says he has an offer from another quarter, but gives you refusal. He will call on you at 3.45.”

The servant was waiting for an answer, which Eustace penciled on his card: “Telephone Cranley I will see him at 3.45.”

“What is it?” asked Mrs. Galbraith.

“Merely a question of the ‘make-up’ of the next issue of the paper,” sighed Eustace.

When he had said it he discovered that he had lied automatically, as it were, with no consciousness of a desire to deceive.

“Journalism must be a grind, Mr. Fenner,” said the Major, desirous to present an amiable front to a gentleman whom his hostess evidently wished to honor, although he wore his hair too long.

“It is responsible work,” admitted the editor.

“The part I can’t understand is the advertisements,” resumed the Major, trying to exhibit an intelligent interest; “how they’re arranged, I mean.”

“They’re not arranged,” said Mr. Selby, “they are paid for.”

“We are free from that anxiety, at least,” replied Eustace sweetly; “we have none, except, of course, of our own publications.”

“It is not our object to make money, but to spread what we conceive to be the light,” explained Mrs. Galbraith.

"Oh, I see," said the Major, anxious to keep in his depths.

"That is so," affirmed Eustace, "we are not a commercial speculation—yet."

"Lay journalism," said Selby, "is now nothing else. Fortunately it has passed its highest point as a popular influence; soon it must content itself with playing the same part in the national life as the 'niggers' play in the economy of the cheaper watering-place."

"You don't mean amuse the public, do you?" inquired the Major, shocked at the idea.

"I mean," replied Selby, "that there is not a better opening for lucrative buffoonery than that afforded by the British Press."

"It is true the newspaper has never risen to the splendor of its opportunities," murmured Eustace, but as he spoke perhaps he recalled opportunities which he himself had missed. His ambition had been to be a moral force, yet here was this fellow Cranley tempting him!

But was Cranley an impostor? After all, might he not believe in the magic power of his talismans? Suppose he were persuaded that they possessed a divine influence, how far was Eustace justified in encouraging the idea?

While the others talked Eustace reviewed his relations with Mr. Cranley, once an active worker in the Chicago branch of the New Christians, where he had acquired reputation as a healer. It chanced, however, that Mr. Cranley was prostrated by a severe attack of fever when visiting Palestine with a party of Cook's tourists. One night, when the attack was at its worst, an Arab, said to be a Christian, and who professed to have power of healing sickness as well as of casting out devils, was brought to him by an anxious friend.

"The Healer's methods were simple," said Cranley, when he told the story. "My visitor, a dark, picturesque tribesman, with splendid

aquiline features, approached my bed and, addressing me in his own tongue, said—

“‘ Brother, take this stone in your hand; believe that you will be well, and lo, well you shall be.’”

“I took the stone,” continued Cranley, “and glanced at it in doubt. It was a dark brown square pebble, on which was cut some Greek words.”

“Seeing me hesitate, the Arab said, in a deep, rich voice which filled me with an ineffable sense of confidence, ‘ Why hesitate? I, too, am a follower of the Great Healer.’”

“Thus encouraged,” resumed Cranley, “I grasped the mystic stone and made the necessary mental effort. In less than two seconds the awful sense of lassitude left me, and I arose perfectly cured.”

Astounded by this miracle, Cranley naturally desired to become possessed of the Healing Stone, which finally the Arab gave him, with his blessing. There were, he said,

among his own people seven similar stones of equal curative power; all of these, according to the ancient legend, St. Peter himself had blessed, and on which the saint had inscribed the sacred words with his own hand.

Returning to America, with the aid of this magic stone Mr. Cranley wrought some wonderful cures. He had cured an anonymous millionaire of epileptic fits, and achieved similar pathological triumphs of a startling but vague character.

Leaving Chicago somewhat hastily, Mr. Cranley came to England, where his appearance in a police court on a charge—which was dismissed—of extorting money under false pretences shook the public's faith in his probity, and, in his own words, "miserably curtailed the area of his public usefulness."

Meanwhile seven other Healing Stones were wasting their miraculous power in the desert. The idea preyed on Mr. Cranley's mind until he set out once more to the East

in search of the Christian tribe who treasured the divine talismans. To his dismay he discovered that the whole of this interesting sect had disappeared except one old man, then on his death-bed because he piously refused to cure himself of senile decay. "I have lived," said the dying patriarch, "five hundred years, and long for rest."

This sage, after a touching interview, entrusted the remaining seven magic stones to Mr. Cranley. In possession, therefore, of eight divine pebbles, all bearing St. Peter's inscription, Mr. Cranley felt himself in a position to dispose of seven. In his search for a market he came to Eustace Fenner for advice.

"Go to the lay Press," said Eustace.

"They're no good," replied Cranley. "You appeal to the only class with faith sufficiently robust; the Blessed Stones would be wasted on unbelievers."

Still, Eustace wondered how far it was con-

sistent with his duty to tell his readers the story of the *Eight Healing Stones of St. Peter*, as the little pamphlet which Mr. Cranley had thoughtfully prepared was entitled. A few days before Mrs. Galbraith's luncheon-party the temptation assumed an aggressive shape. Mr. Cranley offered Mr. Fenner £500 "for whatever good purpose he might care to put it," on the understanding that the story of the miraculous stones should appear in the columns of the *Torch*. Thus it had come to pass that Eustace now found himself compelled to reconsider his spiritual position, for who was he that he should doubt the honesty of others? But it was not until he was called upon to decide, in the midst of an atmosphere where materialism begot worldliness, that his conscience whispered, "I think you may take the risk."

Surely, he reasoned, the Healing Stones, in the hands of complete faith, might be helpful; while in those of the curious skeptic they

would represent objects at least of romantic interest. Besides, he need not be directly responsible. The story might be printed as an outside contribution, unsupported by editorial approval. Even if he were straining a point in Mr. Cranley's favor, how much good might be done with Mr. Cranley's money!

It was not before coffee was brought and Mrs. Galbraith had invited the gentlemen to light their cigarettes that Eustace resumed a part in the conversation. Suddenly he found himself telling Mr. Selby that there was a practical side of life which no one could quite afford to neglect.

"I'm very pleased to hear you say so," said Selby, "very, indeed!"

"But what is the practical side?" asked Mrs. Galbraith.

"The side where we all sell and buy at the market price, to be sure," Selby replied, "and to which even the poets drive their ideals."

Again Eustace felt an icy wind blowing

about his ears. Selby's society was becoming intolerable.

"Surely," he urged in a voice full of pity, "surely, Mr. Selby, you don't consider everything has a sordid price?"

"Everything," replied the cynic, with a glance toward Mrs. Galbraith, "except the ideals of good women."

Eustace could only shake his head sadly and murmur, "Ideals, I take it, are divine."

"What do you think, Major King?" asked Mrs. Galbraith.

"I'm too poor a hand at metaphysics to think at all," said the Major, who thought they were talking nonsense.

"Ideals are only our own private peacocks with their tails spread," sneered Selby.

"I thought they were imaginary standards of perfection," said his daughter, in mitigation of her father's ferocity.

"That is exactly the same thing," said her father.

This speech helped to break up the party. Eustace hurriedly said he must go, since the *Torch* was calling for him.

"It was good of you to come when you must be so busy," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"Good-bye, Mr. Fenner," said Selby; "I look forward to meet you again, but do be careful with your ideals."

"Confound the godless wretch!" Eustace thought, as he stepped into the sunny street, and felt that, for once, he had missed his own brilliant best. He had left Octavia Lee unimpressed; he had been secretly mocked by her father. Suddenly all power of forgiveness vanished.

Eustace jumped into a passing hansom and drove to his meeting with Mr. Cranley.

CHAPTER IX

IT is not good, even for a man of saintly ambitions, to imagine that his finest personal qualities are being overlooked. Eustace's contentment depended on the impression which he believed himself to have made on others. "I am crowned to-day with disappointment," he reflected, as his hansom turned into Park Lane. He repeated the phrase twice to weigh its value, finding comfort of a sort in its picturesqueness. Souls with high spiritual cravings, he told himself, were destined to be rudely brushed aside by vulgar trampling crowds. Suddenly his optimism had vanished. What chances had he of worldly success? Suppose Mrs. Galbraith married again or withdrew her support from him, what would be his fate? A man must live. It was necessary for him to live like a gentleman, yet, with all his reputation for elo-

quence, he was at that moment of personal research conscious of no solid prosperous ground whereon his artistic feet could firmly stand. He was a religious artist without a permanent branch of belief to cultivate. New "movements" were so often swallowed up by those of an older growth; even the things of the spirit might be governed by the caprices of frivolous followers.

Eustace, in his momentary depression, felt the world too harsh and stupid a place for the comfort of a nature so delicately fashioned as his. The great roar of London sounded to him like the groan of a giant exhausted by unending, hopeless toil. The shapeless crowd seemed rolling round him in objectless activity. Must the poor human Sisyphus for ever toil at his accursed stone?

Eustace puffed his cigarette and pictured the awful task; but suddenly a splendid carriage bearing two radiant ladies in the loveliest summer dresses dashed by his cab and

swept on into the Park. They might be the useless bubbles cast up by the great human stream boiling below, but the two elegant women represented at least what Eustace secretly most admired.

Why should *he* toil along the roof and crown of things? Were it not wiser to consult his own material safety than strive toward a more unearthly crown? Could he afford to devote himself entirely to a Faith which could not even assure him a pension for his old age? Eustace was terrified at the thought of growing old, although he had ceased to pluck out the gray hairs remorselessly invading his temples.

Black care might have driven his cab that sunny afternoon, so pitilessly did the gloomy pageant of anxieties troop across his mind. He owed his tailor £50 which he could not pay; the last quarter's rent for his rooms was still owing; the balance at the bank overdrawn. While all other men of his age and

education possessed pleasant wives, rosy children, and, what was more essential still for happiness, fixed incomes, what had he? The care of a New Christian Church and the patronage of the group of amiable women to whom its novelty appealed. Scoffers ranked them altogether as a little army of harmless neurotics. When Eustace was hot with his own eloquence on his own platform it seemed to him that he was borne along on the crest of the wave which rises in the mysterious depths of human faith; but, here in a hansom cab, at the corner of Mount Street, amid the stern facts of life, faith seemed too fragile and shadowy a thing to be seriously dealt with in a bleak world where matter inexorably reigned.

But there was a ray of light.

Mr. Cranley's £500 would free Eustace of embarrassment for at least six months, and in six months much might happen.

The cab stopped before the florist's shop.

Eustace felt in his pockets; they contained only two coins—a shilling and half a sovereign. He handed the cabman the shilling.

“Bare fare’s eighteenpence!” growled the man, rejecting it.

“I doubt it,” murmured Eustace mildly.

“Doubt what you like,” said the cabman. “My fare’s eighteenpence, an’ I mean to ‘ave it.”

Eustace glanced up at him.

“A truculent-looking fellow,” he thought; then he looked in through the shop window. The pretty, fair-haired girl within was watching him.

“If you insist, I must ask for change,” said Eustace.

“The young lady’ll give it yer, I’ll be bound,” said the driver.

Eustace entered the flower-shop.

“Do change ten shillings for me, Miss Taylor, please,” he said in humorous entreaty. “Such a horrid man!”

The girl, who knew him well and liked him, handed him the money. She had charming blue eyes, long lashes, slender fingers.

"Please make me a buttonhole, Miss Taylor, to save me from the infection of the cabman's temper."

While she was choosing the buds he stepped out and paid the cab.

The man drove off without thanking him.

"A surly wretch!" said Eustace, returning. "Sweetness of manner, Miss Taylor, is absolutely essential to my comfort. What a lovely bud! Do you mind putting it in my coat?"

The girl smilingly fixed the rosebud in his coat.

"Shall I put it down to your account, Mr. Fenner?" she asked.

"Do, please! A pin just there, Miss Taylor. Thanks, that's charming."

His good temper was returning. Something in the girl's gracious prettiness soothed

him; the deep scent of the roses was pleasantly refreshing and luxurious.

Eustace would have lingered in the flower-shop—for he usually did what he found most agreeable at the moment—but suddenly a cab stopped, and looking round, he saw Mr. Cranley, brisk, clean-shaven, and cunning-eyed, looking at them.

Eustace stepped out hurriedly to meet his visitor.

“Delighted to see you, Mr. Cranley,” said he, conscious that the flower in his coat gave him a less serious air than the occasion demanded.

“Thank you, Mr. Fenner,” replied Mr. Cranley in a quaint transatlantic accent which seemed to give a half-contemptuous and half-humorous twist to his words, “thank you, sir. That’s a very elegant rosebud, and I guess a very charming young lady pinned it in your buttonhole.”

“Step in and walk straight up,” said Eus-

tace, faintly annoyed at Mr. Cranley's reference to an incident which a higher tact would have ignored.

Then he opened the side door, followed Mr. Cranley up to his rooms, where, moving forward an armchair, he said. "Sit down, Mr. Cranley."

Cranley sat down.

"I hope," he said, "Mr. Fenner, that you don't regard me as a simple vendor of charms, amulets, *et cetera*."

"My dear sir!" protested Eustace.

"Because if you did," resumed Cranley, "I should be very" (he pronounced it "vurry") "sorry for myself."

"Let me assure you first of all that I do not for a moment doubt your beliefs in the genuineness of your amulets."

"Of my Sacred Healing Stones, if you please, Mr. Fenner."

"Of your Healing Stones, then. Your own recovery—due possibly to a power within

yourself rather than in the stone—affords adequate testimony of your faith in their power.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fenner, that is kindly said,” replied Mr. Cranley. “Now this is my proposal, and a very simple one it is. You shall tell the story of my acquisition of these stones in your paper. I hold them as a sacred trust, Mr. Fenner. It is my duty to see that they do not fall into undeserving hands.”

“But I understood you were anxious to dispose of them,” said Eustace, a little puzzled.

“Not until their efficacy has been proved, sir.”

“But how?”

“The purchaser must work a cure before being entrusted with the stone,” said Mr. Cranley.

“Still I do not quite see.”

“The thing is plain, though,” replied Mr. Cranley. “You tell the story in the *Torch*, mentioning, of course, my name and address.

Some of those who read this strange story may apply to me. The applicant I deem worthiest shall test the stone; you shall publish an account of the result obtained in your paper. For your share in this good work you shall receive five hundred pounds to be used for any worthy purpose you may choose—of course, in complete secrecy. No questions will be asked. Thus you have no responsibility, even if my views of St. Peter's Blessed Stones are illusory; on the other hand, the possession of five hundred pounds will give a man of your fine nature opportunities as a benefactor which I understand are at present denied."

But still Eustace Fenner faintly revolted.

"But are we not applying methods of the ordinary market to things of divine origin, and shall we not——"

But Cranley promptly interrupted him.

"No, we shall not, sir. The surest methods of spreading the truth are the best. The

stones must be known to be appreciated. Believe me, Mr. Fenner, in consulting you I have adopted the least irreverent means of advertising the power for good with which it has pleased Providence to endow me. At one time the lay Press tempted me by its channels of publicity, but I thought of you, and divine instinct told me that I was on the right tack. Here is a check drawn in your name, and here is the little article which I want you to be good enough to print. You will perceive that the story is told in the least sensational manner. We are both busy men, and even now the sick and suffering are waiting at our gate, Mr. Fenner. You will surely help me to reach them!"

Such an appeal was hard to reject.

Eustace read the typewritten paragraphs which Cranley handed to him. They contained nothing compromising, except that Mr. Cranley's address at a West End hotel was given, followed by the announcement

that those who desired to learn more concerning the miraculous nature of the Sacred Stones would find their present owner willing to afford them every possible information.

“Mayn’t I leave out that?” asked Eustace.

“Impossible,” said Mr. Cranley, “it is most essential.”

The check seemed to rustle itself prosperously on the table whenever Eustace’s eyes fell upon it.

“May I see the stone?” said Eustace.

“They’re not much to look at,” replied Cranley.

He drew from his waistcoat pocket a little box of morocco leather, opening it with a simple spring, and displayed a flat, brown stone.

“I had the boxes made for convenience,” explained Cranley.

“And this,” thought Eustace, “is a stone which St. Peter has blessed and engraved.”

He looked at it in silence a moment. The Greek letters seemed very modern in character and extraordinarily distinct.

"It looks modern," said Eustace, with a painful qualm.

"That is a part of the wonder of it," said Cranley. "The letters never grow dimmer; they can't, nor does the surface become worn. The stones have been unchanged for nearly nineteen hundred years."

"But a word's missing," objected Eustace. "*θεράπευετε* means 'heal'; where is the rest of the phrase?"

"I never learned Greek," said Cranley, "but the Greek word meaning sick was obviously omitted by St. Peter because there was not room. The touching command—'Heal'—is surely enough, and that's what this blessed pebble can do in no mistake."

He was beginning to speak irritably.

"Even if I am under an hallucination," he added, "or, worse still, an impostor, you get

off right away, and have five hundred pounds for whatever charity you prefer."

"I agree," said Eustace recklessly.

"That's right, Mr. Fenner; kindly pass the check through your bank at once. Now I must be off. Good-bye till the 'pars.' are printed and published."

Then Cranley took Eustace by the hand and left him sitting at the table opposite the typed article and the check.

"At least he trusts me," thought Eustace.

The same evening he posted the article to the printers and the check to his bankers.

CHAPTER X

CRANLEY'S article, published in the *Torch* two days after Mrs. Galbraith's luncheon-party, made a mild sensation among the limited but novelty-loving public which the paper reached.

As soon as she had read it Mrs. Galbraith, a little uneasy, hurried over to see Mr. Fenner. The story, she considered, calculated to bring New Christian methods into disrepute. Healing Stones obviously opened the door to suspicious imposture; moreover, unfortunately they knew nothing of Mr. Cranley.

Eustace, prepared for her criticism, replied that the New Christians must be above prejudice, just as their creed was above comparison with other forms of sacred pathology. Although he personally suspected Mr. Cranley of being the victim of self-illusion so far as his own cure was concerned, yet there was

absolutely no doubt that the vanished Christian tribes of whom the stones were obtained fully believe in their miraculous power. This fact alone, Eustace considered, gave the story undoubted claim to the consideration of a journal devoted to the science of healing by the agency of faith.

“But we shall be laughed at,” said Mrs. Galbraith.

“It is impossible for us to be derided more ignorantly than we are,” replied Eustace.

He was now free from pecuniary worry. The Sacred Stones had at least cured him of that; he felt grateful to them. When, therefore, he perceived Mrs. Galbraith to be still unconvinced, he adopted a bold course.

“I see you are not satisfied with me,” he said gently, “but an editor can only follow his convictions. Rather than be the cause of any division among us, I would resign.”

“But, Mr. Fenner!” she exclaimed, unprepared for this.

Eustace saw his advantage.

"I would, really," he repeated. "Who knows?—perhaps I may seem too credulous in an unbelieving age."

As he spoke he looked at her with his meekest expression. He seemed so gentle and trusting that Mrs. Galbraith quickly surveyed the work which she fancied he had done for them, and found a brilliant balance in his favor.

Certainly he deserved a free hand.

"We could never contemplate such a step—never!" she said. "You are necessary to us."

"Thank you for your confidence, dear friend," he exclaimed warmly. "I have no claims to infallibility of judgment, and in order to be on the safe side, I promise you that St. Peter's Healing Stones shall never be mentioned again in our columns"—here he paused a moment and added—"after our next issue."

"Why the next issue?" Mrs. Galbraith

asked. "Why mix yourself up further with Mr. Cranley?"

"Because some one who reads us is sure to test the Healing Stones and to desire to give us his experience," said Eustace. "You see, we flung down a sort of challenge to Mr. Cranley, who, no doubt, will insist on what he may, with some justice, consider fair play for his so-called Sacred Stones."

"Fair play?" repeated Mrs. Galbraith, still wondering. "Fair play?"

"Yes; we couldn't very well drop the subject suddenly, as though we had burned our fingers by touching it. Cranley (if he be an impostor, I mean) might even pretend that we regarded him and his Sacred Stones as rivals to ourselves."

"That would be too ridiculous," exclaimed Mrs. Galbraith. "However, the matter shall be left in your hands; only remember that others are not guileless and unsuspecting as yourself."

“You may trust me,” said Eustace. And when she left him, in spite of his extreme admiration for her, for once he felt relieved. All argument in which our own self-respect is necessarily stretched becomes painful and fatiguing. Eustace felt this so strongly that he went into the country for two days on the plea that he was “a little run down and wanted rest.” He knew that the question of his conduct would be settled in Wigpole Street before his return, and after his conversation with Mrs. Galbraith felt he could leave his reputation with confidence in her hands. He even fancied he heard her saying, “If we say too much to Mr. Fenner he will resign.”

And so for a couple of days Eustace stayed at a pleasant country inn in Kent, where the cooking was tolerable, riding a tricycle among lanes white with apple and pear blossom, enjoying the simplicity of rural fare and the peace of pastoral surroundings. The agree-

able holiday made him once more conscious of his own innocence, a sentiment which an effort to read Thomas à Kempis helped to confirm.

When, on the afternoon of the third day, he returned to town, he felt strong enough for his work, and at peace with himself and all the world.

In London a surprise awaited him in the shape of a letter from Lady Elsmuir, one of the lights of his Church, who was reported to have converted her husband, Lord Elsmuir, heir to the earldom of Oxferry, and a gallant sportsman with a brilliant golfing reputation and even a club record to his name.

“Dear Mr. Fenner,” wrote Lady Elsmuir, “your account of St. Peter’s Healing Stones deeply interested me. After reading it I could think of nothing else. It chanced that my housekeeper, Mrs. Palgrave, whom you recommended to me, was complaining of a most painful relaxed throat. I tried to heal

it, but, alas! whether my faith was too undeveloped or hers too weak (she *is*, as you will remember, a clergyman's widow, though still young), I was unsuccessful. Then I thought of the Healing Stones—in fact, I could not get them out of my mind. It was a sort of—obsession, I think the word is. I spoke of it to Lord Elsmuir, who said that he thought I had better go and look at the stones. I took his advice and drove to see Mr. Cranley, whom I found most kind, although with a strong American accent, which you don't in the least mind when you get used to it. I stated Mrs. Palgrave's case, told him how I had failed, although on the same day I had cured the upper housemaid of acute neuralgia. He was most reasonable; not in the least inclined to scoff; quite sure, in fact, as he said, that as a healer I might rely on success in seventy-five per cent. of simple cases. 'Will you let me try one of your Healing Stones, Mr. Cranley?' I pleaded, for he seemed quite

a nice man. 'Certainly,' he replied, 'if you will let me see the patient first, to ascertain whether she be really suffering, and a person deserving the application of a sacred remedy.' For it seems that he has strong scruples against a reckless use of the Cure.

"Then I told him that Mrs. Palgrave was a clergyman's widow, and a most respectable young woman. He reflected a moment, and said, 'If you will send her over to me I will see her. Then, if I consider her a proper subject for treatment, I will let her bring back the stone, and you shall test its efficacy yourself, for *I feel sure I can trust you, Lady Elsmuir.*'

"You see, I remember every word he said; it all seemed so solemn and impressive!

"Remember, the patient must come alone,' he said, as I was leaving.

"Arrived home, I send for Mrs. Palgrave and told her what I proposed. At first she was inclined to treat the matter with levity,

and said 'that it sounded rather like hocus-pocus, and didn't I think so?' 'How can you expect to be cured of your relaxed throat if you are so irreverent?' I said severely.

"This seemed to bring her to a better frame of mind. I sent her off in the carriage, and she was absent about three-quarters of an hour. When she returned her manner was changed; how, I cannot exactly tell you, except that it seemed more subdued.

"'What did Mr. Cranley say?' I asked.

"'He asked me whether I desired to be cured. I said, "Of course." Then, whether I deserved to be. I said "I hoped so." Then he wished to know whether I believed you could cure me. I said, "If Lady Elsmuir can't no one can." "You're sure of that," he added sternly. "Yes," said I, "quite." "Then go back and give her this."'

"Here Mrs. Palgrave produced a little box containing the Healing Stone, which was exactly as described in the *Torch*.

“‘Is your throat relaxed?’ I asked, in order to be sure.

“‘Worse than ever,’ she answered.

“I forgot to tell you that Mr. Cranley told me I must make the patient sit down, and then, placing the stone in her right hand, must say, in a clear, firm voice, ‘Now thy disease shall leave thee. Be whole.’

“I carried out these instructions as directed, and, wonderful as it may seem even to a practitioner of New Christian pathology, in a minute—that is, after I had repeated ‘Be whole’ thrice—Mrs. Palgrave rose to her feet and declared she was perfectly well.

“I rushed down to Lord Elsmuir, who had just returned from a race-meeting, and told him. ‘There are eight of those stones,’ said I; ‘we must have one of them, whatever it cost.’

“‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘they only cure sore throats. We must be sure before we make a bid.’ Of course, this is absurd. Still, I don’t feel that I ought to take any further step be-

fore consulting you. If, therefore, you are back in town, will you come here to dinner to-night? We shall be quite alone, and we can talk it over.

“I have written you quite a long letter, but I am so excited by what has happened that I felt bound to lay the whole case before you, because I feel assured of your sympathy.

“Always sincerely yours,

“DOROTHY ELSMUIR.”

“P.S.—Don't you think something ought to be said of this in the *Torch*? I was thinking of writing to the *Times*; but they might not put my letter in, and Lord Elsmuir says it is not a suitable topic to bring before a great daily newspaper. Besides, the *Times* is, we know, prejudiced against miracles. Lord Elsmuir also thinks this sort of knowledge ought to be kept from the masses, who are as yet unripe for it.”

This letter perplexed Eustace. He began

to foresee trouble. Lady Elsmuir was the connecting link and an excellent conductor between the New Christians of Wigpole Street and that reckless, smart set which makes its own morals and lives down to them. It was her conviction that she could help those frivolous people to a higher life, a conviction regarded as hopeless even by the sanguine Eustace, who was shocked at their desire to test the New Pathology by vulgar standards—to make it, in fact, the servant of their vanity, in spite of his constant assurance from the platform that the efficacy of the creed was in proportion to the virtue of the patient seeking its comfort. It was in vain he assured them that it was not intended to remove crow's-feet from worried eyes, or to replace the skillful hands of *masseuse* or *coiffeur*. He admitted, however, that women who cultivated the higher serenity of thought might retain their beauty to long past middle life, as a result of the ineffable spiritual calm pro-

duced within; but in dealing with the flight of time, beyond this their system, he feared, was not intended to go. "Then there must be limits to its power," these foolish inquirers would exclaim. To this he replied, "The power of the New Christian Pathology is bounded only by the virtue of those accepting its teachings."

Eustace read the letter again and his uneasiness was increased. Cranley and his Healing Stones might well promote a serious division in the Wigpole Street congregation. Already there existed between Lady Elsmuir and Mrs. Galbraith a rivalry which this unfortunate incident might easily embitter.

However, he sent a note accepting Lady Elsmuir's invitation, but suggesting caution in the use of a force of unknown power and unproved origin.

CHAPTER XI

EUSTACE found Lady Elsmuir waiting for him in her drawing-room at Grosvenor Place in a state of excitement. She was a pretty woman, with fair hair and clear blue eyes, but her somewhat receding chin seemed to refute the imperious claims of the eyes. Men who admired her insisted that she was clever. She had written a volume of travels which Slymp, the fashionable ladies' publisher, brought out, after Mr. Metcalf, the sub-editor of the *Tulip*, had, as he constantly boasted, "licked it into shape." The book, entitled "The East and Its Mysteries," was the fruits of a three-months' tour in India and Ceylon. A leading critic (*vide* publisher's advertisement) describes it as "free from those flip-pant and superficial views too common in works of this nature."

"My letter must have greatly astonished

you," said Lady Elsmuir hurriedly, as she shook hands with her guest. "Do you know I'm convinced everything Mr. Cranley claims for the Sacred Stones is true?"

"I have not yet tested their virtue," said Eustace, remembering his letter, "and I think, before accepting their miraculous power as proven, that we should proceed with extreme caution."

"Pray don't misunderstand me, Mr. Fenner. I am quite reasonable, and only claim that the healing capacity of the stones is commensurate with the virtue of the operator."

"But how would this affect a cure in which a virtuous operator were treating a vicious patient?" inquired Eustace.

"Perhaps it might fail then," said Lady Elsmuir, "but if the operator's virtue exceeded the patient's vice, possibly results might be obtained. The Sacred Stones are not a universal panacea, but a tremendous power for good in the hands of the righteous—and I use

the word 'righteous' in no priggish sense, Mr. Fenner."

"Of course not," said Eustace, with an admiring glance at her white shoulders and shining jewels.

"It seems that the Sacred Stones," continued Lady Elsmuir, "endow the deserving amateur with the same power your initiates in Wigpole Street acquire after long study and self-abnegation. The same power that Mrs. Galbraith practises, I am told, so successfully — although I cannot speak from actual experience."

"I can't grant that," said Eustace uneasily. "Our pathology is the result of virtue spiritually organized. The operator with the stone needs nothing but belief in its efficacy."

"Exactly," exclaimed Lady Elsmuir. "Faith alone is requisite. The stone represents the crystallized healing virtue once enjoyed on earth by St. Peter. But perhaps you would like to see Mrs. Palgrave? There

is absolutely no sign of a relaxed throat. I had her examined by the doctor who attends the servants—of course, we never have him for ourselves—but they are so prejudiced and conservative in these things. He said he could hardly believe her throat had ever been relaxed.”

Lady Elsmuir was moving toward the bell to ring for the housekeeper when Eustace stopped her. The presence of Mrs. Palgrave at such a moment, he felt, would merely complicate matters. He remembered how in one of his amiable moments two years ago he had introduced Mrs. Palgrave to his hostess. The young and pretty widow, after the shock of her husband's death, had thought of practising as a New Christian Healer, but, somewhat sensitive to ridicule, she had sought other employment.

The late Rev. James Palgrave had held a living in a fashionable watering-place where, three years after his marriage, he was drowned

while bathing. His tragic death created a painful impression, but his widow endured her bereavement with becoming fortitude. A certain air of refined mystery distinguished Mrs. Palgrave from other widows. Her manners were unparochial, and there were even people who declared that a clergyman ought never to have married a woman of whom his parishioners knew nothing. Eustace, however, knew something. Before her marriage with Mr. Palgrave she had suffered from an "unfortunate attachment"—he used the phrase as a euphemism—which had excited his pity, and his hand had written the certificate of character which had induced Lady Elsmuir to make her a member of her ladyship's domestic staff. Now that she had become associated with Mr. Cranley and Lady Elsmuir's wonderful use of the Healing Stones, however, he began to feel that his kindness of heart might have tempted him to commit an indiscretion. In any case, it

seemed a wiser course to accept Mrs. Palgrave's testimony without investigating its scientific value.

"Don't send for Mrs. Palgrave, please," he said. "It would be a mere waste of time. The test—especially under your eye—is above suspicion. But have you put the stone to other uses? One test is scarcely adequate."

"Well, I have tried it on some one else," Lady Elsmuir replied, after a little hesitation; "only I don't think I ought to tell you. In a way it is a secret."

"In a matter so serious," said he gravely, "I don't think there ought to be any secrecy between us. Remember, I introduced you to the stones, and indirectly am responsible."

"Of course, you won't mention it to any one, Mr. Fenner?" said Lady Elsmuir.

"You speak as in the confessional, Lady Elsmuir."

"You know Mrs. Kinneston?"

“Yes, she comes to Wigpole Street sometimes. She is one of the waverers who do so much harm,” answered Eustace.

“She is a friend of mine,” resumed Lady Elsmuir. “We were at school together. Have you ever noticed anything about her, Mr. Fenner?”

“Except that she is a handsome woman with a frivolous sense of humor—nothing.”

“You haven’t noticed, then, that her hair is turning gray over the temples?—prematurely, she thinks.”

“No; but then I accept gray hair as inevitable,” replied Eustace, remembering his own ineffectual struggle against it.

“Mrs. Kinneston doesn’t. When she heard how I had cured my housekeeper she insisted on trying an experiment on herself.”

“Oh, these godless experiments!” sighed Eustace; “they are the bane of our creed and more destructive to faith than a Darwin or Huxley.”

“I told her I didn’t think it at all nice,” said Lady Elsmuir a little guiltily.

“But you haven’t said what the experiment was,” said Eustace.

“Well, of course, she wanted me to try the stone on her hair.”

“How improper!” exclaimed Eustace; “how very improper! But what happened? I hope you didn’t encourage her.”

“I tried to prevent it—that is, I told her that there were other means of—of—dealing with gray hair, but she said she had a horror of the dye-pot, and that sooner than that she would look as old as Mrs. Walter Price—and you know what that is!—and besides, every one tried chemicals now, and made themselves vulgar frights in consequence. Then I told her it was a sacred trust, and she said, ‘Rubbish! You don’t suppose I imagine you really cured your housekeeper? She’s pulling your leg!’—a dreadful phrase which she has picked up from her son at Eton.

"I feel you are going to yield," murmured Eustace sadly.

"Well, I was nettled," continued Lady Elsmuir, "I admit, and at last I consented."

"What happened?" asked Eustace, interested.

"Well, I told her to sit down in that chair and gave her the Sacred Stone to hold. 'Feel,' I said, 'that your hair shall change to whatever color you like.' 'Bronze,' said she; 'bronze. I'm trying awfully hard.' 'Gray hair, disappear,' said I; 'change to bronze.' Well, I repeated the words at least a dozen times, and every time she said, 'Is there any change yet? I'm trying all I know,' till at last I was obliged to say it was no good, and that the experiment was a failure because of her want of faith. But when she looked at herself in the glass she declared there was much less gray visible under her hat than before, and that she felt an odd sort of glow in her head. I looked, but could see no change.

But she decided that she ought to go and sit quietly alone with the stone and persuade herself her gray hair was an illusion, and that she had a beautiful bronze head of hair in its place. She was sure this was the only way to give the experiment a chance. 'If,' she said, 'anything comes of it I'll run into dinner to-night and show you.' Then she left me. Now do you think I did anything wrong—anything, I mean, which might interfere in the future with my healing power?"

"I am afraid," said Eustace gravely, "that you were abusing sacred phenomena with which, in other ages, only the priesthood were permitted to deal. But it is not for me to reproach you."

"But what do you think I ought to do, Mr. Fenner? You make me feel nervous."

"Make up your mind never to put faith to so ignoble a test again," he answered severely.

But a hand was heard on the handle of the door. Lady Elsmuir said, "Mind, not a word

about Mrs. Kinneston's experiment before Douglas!" just as Lord Elsmuir entered the room.

"Mr. Fenner has been good enough to come round to advise us about the Sacred Stones," said Lady Elsmuir.

Then Lord Elsmuir came forward in a slow, heavy way, shook hands with Eustace, and said, "Lady Elsmuir thinks the stones A 1, Mr. Fenner. Now what would be a fair offer for one? It isn't every one can make 'em work, don't you know."

"I can't advise you in such a matter, I can't indeed," said Eustace.

"That means I must give Cranley his price. However, I don't think the stone's been properly tested. I'll wait a bit. Did you ever see one of these things? I'm interested in talismans and in a small way a collector."

Lord Elsmuir pushed back a square shirt-cuff and displayed on a hairy forearm a gold bracelet of oriental workmanship.

“Now I gave a goodish price for that,” he said. “It has an Arabic inscription supposed to bring luck. If you’re in sympathy with it, you can’t lose at cards. But I can’t work it for nuts, I never win.”

“No wonder!” said Lady Elsmuir, “you’re the worst Bridge player in London, but I’ve no patience with such superstition.”

But a thrilling surprise awaited them. The door opened, the footman announced “Mrs. Kinneston,” and a lady in white satin, gleaming pearl ornaments, and dazzling bare shoulders entered. For a moment none of them recognized her, because her hair, which fell in beautiful masses over her brows, had become a splendid shining bronze.

“Don’t you know me?” she asked, with a proud smile, as she stood under the soft glow of the shaded lamps. “Don’t you know me?”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Lord Elsmuir.

“The stone worked after all, then!” cried Lady Elsmuir, trembling with excitement

and delight. "Oh, Mabel, what a glorious color! And how lovely you look!"

"I only discovered it two hours ago," said Mrs. Kinneston, still smiling (impudently, it seemed to Eustace). "I went to sleep after lunch, feeling strangely tired. When I awoke and saw myself in the glass I cried for joy. It was good of you, Dolly. How can I ever repay you? We *have* scored this time!"

But Eustace Fenner did not rejoice. He saw in a vision his congregation leaving him and running after Mr. Cranley and his miraculous stones.

"Congratulate me too, Mr. Fenner," said the triumphant Mrs. Kinneston.

"I am too astonished for words," exclaimed Eustace, who could not help suspecting that all was not right.

CHAPTER XII

POOR Eustace found nothing but mortification of the spirit at Lady Elsmuir's dinner. Mrs. Kinneston was the most disturbing element. For one who believed that a miracle had been worked in her favor she afforded a melancholy spectacle of human levity. The flippancy of her conversation shocked Eustace. What did she mean by repeating as though it were a joke that she had exhausted all the virtue of the Sacred Stone in one "go," and that, after such luck, it was scarcely worth while having "another shot"? And why did she laugh?

Then there was Lord Elsmuir. After the first surprise his lordship seemed to take the miracle of the bronze hair as a matter of course, while Lady Elsmuir, instead of gathering from it the obvious lesson enforcing the discouragement of duplicity in others, saw in

the bewildering phenomenon merely the triumph of her own powers of faith.

There was, Eustace reflected, a point at which faith becomes vulgar credulity, and he felt that Lord and Lady Elsmuir had passed all rational and dignified limits of human trust.

More than once he was on the point of uttering this truth aloud, but he remembered he was eating the *entrées* and drinking the champagne of patrons whom it would be a breach of etiquette to offend; so he held his peace.

"Of course," said Lady Elsmuir, "you will announce my cure of Mrs. Palgrave in the next number of the *Torch*?"

"If you will address a letter to the editor," he replied, "it shall be printed. That, I think, is the fairest way of dealing with—eh—what has occurred."

"But please don't say anything about my little affair," said Mrs. Kinneston; "it would

seem so vain-glorious. You see, my hair ought never to have been gray at all. It is only because I was such a believer that I got it round again."

This remark struck Eustace as absurd on the part of a woman with a daughter in her seventeenth year. However, he answered as politely as he could—

"I shall make no reference to what has happened in your case, Mrs. Kinneston."

"The worst of it is," she said, turning to Lord Elsmuir, "people are so uncharitable. No one outside our circle will believe the thing wasn't done in Bond Street."

"Don't worry about that," said his lordship. "It looks so fetching that they won't care twopence how the trick came off."

"But it won't come off," giggled Mrs. Kinneston.

This conversation so jarred on Eustace that, although he fully realized what was due to people in his host's position, he escaped

from them as soon as he could without visible disrespect.

“What can be done,” he wondered sadly, “with such souls as these?”

As he glanced up from the quiet street to Lord Elsmuir’s open windows, Mrs. Kinneson’s voice and the jingle of the piano reached him. She was declaring—immodestly, it seemed to the sensitive Eustace—that she was the “Light of Asia.”

But a soft wind blew to him from the trees of the park, and as he walked back to his rooms, smoking one of Lord Elsmuir’s fine cigars, he endeavored to see the best side of conduct which a less forgiving moralist might with reason have censured. For he knew he could not change the spots in the world.

Before going to bed he made an effort to compose his mind by serious reading, once more selecting Thomas à Kempis; but finding himself in no mood for such comfort, he turned to the last number of *Truth*, which

afforded at least a crude relaxation to his mental tension.

On the following morning he overslept himself, and woke to discover his morning tea cold. Before he had finished dressing the maid knocked at his door to say that Mr. Cranley was waiting to see him.

Eustace had no wish to meet Mr. Cranley, especially before his resolution had been braced up to the worries of the day by the refreshment of breakfast, but he told the servant to request Mr. Cranley to be good enough to wait a moment, and put on a dark morning coat instead of the garment of flowered silk in which he was accustomed to break his fast.

When he entered the sitting-room the sun was streaming over the white cloth and pretty china of the breakfast-table, and Mr. Cranley was standing by the window, holding in his hand a very glossy new hat.

“Ah, Mr. Cranley,” said Eustace, “de-

lighted to see you! Can I offer you some breakfast?"

"I thank you, sir," replied his visitor; "I breakfasted an hour ago, and am now pressed for time."

"Oh, you Americans!" smiled Eustace. "I picture you, booted and spurred, riding on Time and whipping him up to your own magnificent stride."

"We do get in first—when we can, Mr. Fenner," said Mr. Cranley; "but with your permission I'll take a chair and beg ten minutes of your leisure."

"By all means," said Eustace genially.

"I was rather hoping," observed Mr. Cranley as he sat down in the armchair which the other, with a wide gesture of welcome, pushed forward for him—"I was rather hoping, Mr. Fenner, that you would have sent me the little 'par.' which is to appear in your next issue."

"To tell you the truth, I feel somewhat

diffident," said Eustace. "What I said of the Sacred Stones created annoyance."

"Among the N.C.P.?" interrupted Cranley.

"Among the—eh—what?" inquired Eustace, who disliked the irreverence of initials.

"The New Christian Paths, as we call them on the other side," said Cranley.

"Exactly," replied Eustace. "You know what my position is, Mr. Cranley, with regard to them."

"It isn't mighty clear to me, Mr. Fenner, but I guess you're keeping your end up."

"I am anxious to—eh—do my duty," replied Eustace, "and that is not always plain. Some of my colleagues have objected."

"You might tell them about the little check for your pet charity, Mr. Fenner. I don't think your colleagues would object then. That draft has been returned to me—it gave me pleasure, quite unselfish pleasure, my dear sir, to see your name on the back. But a

contract is a contract, and I should like to know what you propose. Those wonderful stones of mine have had a phenomenal success."

"I was dining with Lord Elsmuir last night," said Eustace, "and I came under the shadow of two miracles, if I may without disrespect employ the phrase."

"Dining with Lord Elsmuir!" said Mr. Cranley, impressed, as Eustace intended he should be.

"His lordship wished to consult me about the steps necessary to acquire one of your Sacred Stones."

"And may I ask what advice you gave?"

"He interpreted it very simply," replied Eustace, "and inferred that he would have to pay your price. Of course, I shall not presume to inquire what that is. To me the subject is a sacred one."

Mr. Cranley's manner softened; Eustace saw the point which he had gained.

“Her ladyship seems to have a faith of the highest N.C.P. dimensions,” said Cranley, after a moment’s reflection. “I heard of her gratifying success with that very charming and amiable dependent of hers, Mrs. Palgrave; but you spoke of two miracles, Mr. Fenner.”

“The other case makes me sad,” said Eustace; “but I will tell you under the seal of secrecy.”

“That is a wise step on your part,” replied Cranley; “it may even send up my price.”

“You have heard of our Smart Set, Mr. Cranley?”

“I have, sir, and even met them. We raise bright specimens on our side, too, Mr. Fenner.”

“You know what their moral tone is, then,” said Eustace.

“I have not examined it through a microscope, but I can gauge it,” replied the other.

“Well, a surprising operation has been per-

formed on a lady who belongs to that set by your stone, and to-morrow, if I am not mistaken, you will want no more—eh—assistance from the *Torch*.”

“What was she cured of?” asked Mr. Cranley, deeply interested.

“Gray hair; it changed it to bronze. But the whole thing, I repeat, saddens me, Mr. Cranley. I can’t help suspecting that the lady practised some deception, and that the change was due rather to chemical agency which, for her credit’s sake, or by way of an unbecoming jest, she wishes to attribute to the miraculous influence of the stone.”

“Mr. Fenner,” said Cranley solemnly, “you do credit neither to the lady whose name you discreetly conceal nor to the stone which is capable of anything in proper hands.”

“But don’t you see,” exclaimed Eustace, driven to direct methods by the other’s impenetrable face, “that the lady in question is a humorist of a robust type, and that your

Sacred Stones will be made the subject of irreverent jesting among some of the least serious women in London?"

"A Sacred Stone blessed by St. Peter, which has stood nearly two thousand years' wear and tear, won't mind being laughed at! Doesn't the community in Wigpole Street take its daily dose of mockery with touching equanimity? But you are wrong, Mr. Fenner, and if I may use the word without offense, uncharitable to the lady with the new bronze hair. Where you suspected deception of a jocular nature I scent a *bonâ-fide* miracle. I hope I have not been a N.C.P. for nothing, Mr. Fenner."

"Time will show," said Eustace.

"Meanwhile how about that little 'par.?' " asked Mr. Cranley, referring to the subject of his visit.

"Lady Elsmuir proposes to write a letter to the *Torch* describing the nature of her success with Mrs. Palgrave; after that we

shall be unable to criticise the Healing Stones further.”

Mr. Cranley looked at Eustace for a moment, but thoughtfully.

“We can talk of that another time,” he answered. “For the moment I needn’t take up any more of your valuable leisure. You’ll need breakfast. Good morning.”

Then he wrung Eustace’s soft white hands with sinewy fingers and left the room. Eustace glanced from his window and saw him hurrying down the street.

The visit left Eustace very uneasy. In the afternoon he thought of calling on Mrs. Galbraith, but much as he desired to see Mrs. Lee again, he thought it wiser to keep away until the complications which “this confounded American adventurer” was weaving were complete, for after the latter’s ill-veiled threats Eustace felt compelled, in spite of his wide charity, to regard Cranley in that light.

The rest of the day Eustace spent at a

mixed club as restfully as he could, amusing himself with the ladies' newspapers, but on the following morning he was very busy. He had to read the proofs for the coming number of the *Torch* and prepare for his evening address in Wiggpole Street. For once both these duties troubled him. There was no communication from Lady Elsmuir, and he dreaded the next step which Cranley's audacity might suggest. However, he decided to make no reference to the Sacred Stones of St. Peter unless her ladyship wrote. While he was hesitating, a brief note from Cranley much perturbed him.

"Dear Mr. Fenner," he said, "I have just had an interview with Lady Elsmuir, who has decided to give her experiences to our friends in Wiggpole Street. I thought you would like to know, as you might think it well to prepare your own always interesting address in accordance.

"Yours, J. M. CRANLEY."

Now Eustace was a man of thought, not a man of action; an emergency bewildered him. Should he appeal to Lady Elsmuir and beg her, for the sake of promoting unanimity among the followers of the New Creed, to wait until the Sacred Stones had been tested on a scale proportionate to Cranley's wide, miraculous claims? But suppose she were to agree to this advice, might not Cranley be tempted to act vindictively? There was that unfortunate incident of the check—so easily misunderstood too! Cranley was not a safe man to offend. On the whole, it seemed better to allow the threatening crisis to shape itself. The intrusion of the healing virtues of the Sacred Stones into the ritual of the New Christians could not fail to obstruct the healthy development of the purer doctrine. There were, too, faint-hearted followers in the community ready to believe anything, wavering souls who ought to be spared temptation. Still, reasoned Eustace, in this world, weak

or strong, we must take our chances. All he could do, he felt, was to prepare his audience for the surprise in store for them.

But he was so worried that he was quite unable to take any solid refreshment before going to the meeting in Wigpole Street; although a glass of soda-water, relieved from insipidity by the infusion of a little old brandy, supplied for the moment the place of his customary nourishment.

When Eustace took his seat on the platform the meeting was crowded to excess, and an air of the greatest expectancy prevailed. In her usual place sat Mrs. Galbraith, Octavia Lee with her. Near them was Lady Elsmuir, supported by a group of smart friends; behind was Mrs. Kinneston, the fatal bronze hair shining defiantly under the raised brim of a dashing new hat. She was whispering and smiling with a handsome young man several years her junior. In the middle of the rows of chairs Eustace found Mrs. Pal-

grave in a neat black costume, which reticently suggested a pretty figure. The discordant elements crowding together seemed guided by a maliciously hostile band, for in the seats under the shadow of the gallery Eustace's troubled eyes discovered Cranley, and standing near the door, because no chair was vacant, Mr. Selby, with the expression on his face of one who anticipates amusement.

But the service began; the appointed chapter from the Book of the Venerable Inventor of their Faith was read, the hymns were sung, and the moment for Eustace's address reached.

He felt himself called upon for a supreme effort, but the feeling that Cranley, as well as John Selby, was mocking him constantly dragged him down. Habit had rendered easy the first part of his address, in which he explained the object and growth of the New Christian Creed to an audience incapable of keeping it in their mind, but when he reached the point where he found it necessary to in-

sist that between faith and ignorant credulity a wide gulf must be fixed he heard breakers ahead. He knew Cranley's eye was upon him, and grew nervous; he felt Selby was laughing at him, and became uncomfortable; the sympathy to which he trusted for encouragement seemed absent.

He told them, however, that even in his beliefs man must be guided by reason. Their System of Healing, proved as its efficacy had been by a hundred thousand cures, was still a mockery to the vast majority, who spurned its teaching and rejected its results. There were scoffers, too, even present at their meetings; there was the Worldling—they might know him by his smile (this arrow winged its way in the direction of the supercilious Selby)—and the so-called Man of Science, who desired to measure the mystery of the world by the table of logarithms. As few of the audience knew what sort of table this was, the comparison was a telling one.

“Still,” resumed Eustace, “in dealing with our results we must be careful lest we deceive ourselves. Let us first be sure that sickness exist before applying the remedy. In the New Christian System of Healing our trained practitioners are not misled. It is true the departure from health in man is the result of want of moral harmony with nature, and that we remedy the first by curing the last. The phenomena of disease are as well known to our practitioners as to the surgeons and physicians of a system rapidly becoming obsolete, and we are even less likely to be deceived by vulgar illusions. This is not the case with the amateurs who employ our methods without having grasped their real significance. I have felt called upon to utter this warning in the interests of a religion of which the aim is universal sympathy with what is divine in life; but I do not reflect upon the motives or conduct of others who may travel more or less directly toward the same goal on paths

similar to our own. Be not deceived either by the temptations of vanity, nor by what is still more dangerous, the temptation to promote, by a Science whose origin is sacred and eternal, interests purely unworthy and ephemeral. We teach the art of Goodness, not the art of Beauty; the growth of purity, not the accumulation of vulgar wealth."

When Eustace sat down he felt that he had created a sensation, but he feared that it was not quite of the character he desired. However, he had cleared his conscience.

For a moment no one stirred, and Eustace dared to hope that what he had said had moved to obedience even Lady Elsmuir's vanity, but a quick rustle of silken skirts in her direction told him that he was mistaken. Suddenly she was on her feet and he saw that Mrs. Galbraith was watching her with disapproval.

Lady Elsmuir held a sheet of paper in her hand.

“What I want to say is not easy,” she began, quite free from nervousness, “so I have written most of it down.”

Here, with a little spasm of resentment, Eustace saw the cunning handiwork of Cranley.

“In the last number of the *Torch*,” continued Lady Elsmuir, “there appeared a remarkable account of the Sacred Stones of St. Peter, of their marvelous curative powers, and of their acquisition by an American gentleman who was or is a member of our Creed.”

“Is!” cried a voice. “Is!”


“I’m glad of that,” exclaimed her ladyship, glancing with an air of patronage in the direction of the interruption.

“I have been a Healer,” she resumed, “with more or less success for eighteen months; but it chanced that, on the day after the article was printed, I failed with a member of my own household. She was suffering from a

badly relaxed sore throat, and I was naturally much disappointed. Was it my weak faith or any unworthiness on the part of the patient? But you will imagine how I felt."

A number of pretty hats nodded in sympathy.

"Well, the idea of Saint Peter's Healing Stones haunted me," continued Lady Elsmuir, now thoroughly enjoying herself, "till it became a positive obsession" (Eustace groaned in spirit at a word with which the speaker seemed almost childishly pleased), "and at last I called on the gentleman who had acquired these Sacred Stones and begged to be allowed to try one on my patient. After taking every precaution to avoid imposture on the part of the patient by assuring himself of the actual existence of disease, he finally consented. I applied the remedy as instructed, and obtained the most miraculous results. My patient rose to her feet perfectly cured. That is all I have to say, except that my con-



science would not permit me to keep such knowledge to myself."

Lady Elsmuir resumed her seat amid a rustle of excitement in which an element of incredulity was distinctly noticeable. Before the murmur ceased Mrs. Palgrave was on her feet, demure, graceful, frankly reticent.

"I am the patient whom Lady Elsmuir cured," she said. "I was suffering from a bad sore throat; it was much relaxed; I was quite unable to swallow. I was alarmed, for I never have sore throat, and feared it might be diphtheria. My alarm increased when Lady Elsmuir failed to cure me by the—eh—our ordinary methods. She so seldom does fail! I felt, too, her want of success must be due to some moral unworthiness in me, and was very unhappy in consequence."

Here some one at the back of the audience sniggered offensively, fortunately without embarrassing the speaker, who continued—

"Before trying the Healing Stone Lady

Elsmuir sent me to see Mr. Cranley, who looked at my throat and said, 'It is a very bad throat.' Then he asked, 'Do you deserve to be cured?' I said, 'I hope so.' Then he asked, 'Do you believe Lady Elsmuir can cure you?' I replied, 'If she cannot, nobody can.' Then he said, 'Tell Lady Elsmuir to use the stone as I taught her.' I did, and was cured immediately. That is all I have to say."

Mrs. Palgrave resumed her seat amid a renewed murmur. Some one at the back whispered, "It's a put-up job"; but nobody except his neighbor heard him, for an American voice was holding the attention of the audience. It was Mr. Cranley, who thus spoke—

"I have little claim on your attention, but feel that I must thank Mr. Fenner for his excellent and touching address, especially for the necessary warning against the danger of amateurism in the divine province of spiritual healing. From all mental medicine the per-

sonal factor must be eliminated. At the same time we must not forget that the Sacred Stones of St. Peter (the existence of which, in his editorial capacity, Mr. Fenner introduced to you) represent a miraculous link between the power enjoyed by the Apostles nearly two thousand years ago and that which the most advanced religious insight has rediscovered to-day. I am the present proprietor of this sacred responsibility. The power to apply it is limited only by the extent of human faith. How far they may work in unbelieving hands I know not, but of this I am assured—to belief all things are possible. Of this divine truth the miraculous stones afford a concrete and enduring proof. I will say no more.”

The audience sat murmuring a moment, as audiences do who feel that by agreeable stages of surprise they have attained a novel sensation, when an unexpected shock, which jarred painfully on the solemnity of the occasion, was felt.

A vulgar-looking fat man, in the middle of the seats, who apparently had come to scoff, rose to his feet just as the lady in the rostrum was giving out the final hymn, and said—

“I understand that these Sacred Stones are for sale. In order that we may all have an equal chance, I would propose that they be put up to auction after being advertised in the usual manner.”

The proposal was met with a suppressed murmur of amusement, which, however, the stern “Hush!” of the larger and more serious part of the audience instantly suppressed. A sense of shame was felt when, in an injured voice, the lady on duty read the first verse of the hymn which this unseemly incident had interrupted. The following is the first verse:—

“We give them health, their own ;
Whate'er the gift may be,
And all they have is theirs alone,
And we give willingly.”

Having sung this, the congregation separated.

In the wide entrance hall, however, they gathered in groups, talking excitedly. One group was disappointed because Mrs. Kinneston had not spoken.

"She funk'd it," said a young woman, "because she felt sure no one would believe her, and she wasn't far out."

But Eustace, grieved and pained and longing to be alone, overheard this remark and the flippant laugh it provoked.

He wished especially to avoid Mrs. Galbraith, but she stopped him at the door.

"That man," she said, "has engineered a vulgar advertisement at our expense."

He had never seen her so indignant before.

"I was helpless," said Eustace. "You heard my warning."

"Come to me to-morrow," said Mrs. Galbraith, "and we will think over what ought to be done."

She hurried down the steps to her carriage, followed by Octavia Lee. The footman held open the door.

“Good night, Mrs. Lee,” said Eustace. “You have to-night witnessed the chief danger threatening all human endeavor to deal with the Higher Life.”

“Good night, Mr. Fenner,” she replied, “but the whole thing struck me as staggering toward farce.”

Then she passed on, and John Selby, with a malicious smile on his face, met him.

“That American has scored off you, Mr. Fenner. It was the funniest thing I ever saw in my life. They are practical people. But why did you walk into his trap? You mustn't let your flock get out of hand again. If you do there will be trouble.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Selby,” said Eustace, “for I am overwrought, and have not dined, and am in nowise fitted to discuss the question with you. Good night!”

Then he ran down the steps and jumped into a hansom.

“The Café Royal!” he cried to the driver. And it was not until he had nearly finished a bottle of Burgundy and more than half eaten his dinner that Eustace was enabled to take a calmer view of that distracting evening.

CHAPTER XIII

ON the following morning Eustace woke with a headache, and to the unpleasant sense that a difficult interview with Mrs. Galbraith was before him. There had been so much sympathy between them hitherto, his admiration for her character was so sincere, that he suffered to think he might have offended her—especially as he was conscious of his innocence.

But if Eustace pitied himself, he feared that he hated Cranley—or, rather, as he introspectively reasoned, that he despised his character. How could he longer respect a man who had “engineered”—he recalled Mrs. Galbraith’s contemptuous phrase—an advertisement at the expense of the solemn doctrines which they both professed to teach? Cranley, he felt, had acted as a traitor to a cause which every duty taught him must be

held sacred. Was not this treason of the worst kind? Cranley had tempted a colleague in a moment of pecuniary embarrassment, then threatened him, then made him a helpless tool in an unhallowed enterprise to get money from people who, in their eagerness to believe what was beyond their intellectual grasp, had lost control of all healthy incredulity.

For Eustace had now become convinced that authority is as essential in matters of belief as in other departments of knowledge. He feared for the future of the New Christian pathology unless its organization were stiffened. What their creed needed, it seemed to him, was a High Priest with discretionary powers to decide what was orthodox, what heterodox superstitions borrowed from movements merely mimicking wisdom which the vulgar mind cannot grasp.

“Well,” thought Eustace resignedly at last, after much inward searching, “I suppose

every great human effort in Faith-culture must produce its own Judas."

The parallel relieved his mind. His thoughts were still pursuing the gloomy tenor Cranley's conduct suggested, when a letter was brought to him in that adventurer's writing.

"Dear Mr. Fenner," it said, "pray don't trouble any more *re* Sacred Healing Stones in *Torch*. The stones are now going to boom all along the line! That was a most eloquent address of yours, by the way. My compliments on the edifying discussion it provoked at Wigpole Street.—Yours always, J. T. C."

Eustace, though he detected what he called "a note of persiflage" in the vulgar phrasing of this brief communication, was yet relieved in his mind. At all events, it freed him from the hateful promise to "write up" the stones again and made his interview with Mrs. Galbraith less difficult.

What attitude should he assume, he won-

dered. The moment obviously called for restrained dejection; he feared even to admit the possibility of error on his part.

Prompted by his natural sense of fitness, Eustace put on a black suit and black tie, and started immediately after breakfast to confer with Mrs. Galbraith.

The morning was cloudy; rain had fallen in the night; a wet wind was shaking the raindrops from the leaves of the trees in the park.

It was, he felt, a day of humiliation, and he therefore entered an omnibus and sat resignedly beside an old lady with a damp waterproof and damper umbrella.

What should he say to Mrs. Galbraith, and what would she say to him?

He reached the house, and was shown into the room which had been the late Mr. Galbraith's study, an apartment still bearing traces of its former occupant's character in solid, practical, mid-Victorian furniture. He knew it was a room used only by Mrs. Gal-

braith on unpleasant occasions. There once a quarter she discussed her affairs with her lawyer, but in it Eustace had never been received before. To his sensitive nature the incident seemed full of omens.

Mrs. Galbraith sat at the writing-table; the serenity of her face was troubled.

Eustace's heart beat; a feeling closely resembling shame, but rendered chillier by apprehension, crept over him. He was conscious of a sense of antagonism between them. This, at all costs, must be removed. If this handsome woman who shared his opinions, even to the extent of looking up to him as a spiritual guide, had been only something nearer to him than a friend; if he could share her worldly prosperity, and she the complete comfort of his spiritual insight—then Eustace felt this deplorable scandal would never have occurred. "Virtue protected by ample bank balances," he thought at that desponding moment, "is alone impregnable."

“Well, Mr. Fenner,” said Mrs. Galbraith, who at less solemn moments addressed him as Eustace, “well.”

He sank on a chair, his white hands falling between his knees in a silence which the contrast to his customary fluency rendered impressive.

Finding he did not speak, Mrs. Galbraith continued—

“Are there any more comic miracles to report? Have these wonderful stones restored other gray hairs to their unnatural bronze?”

The unwonted bitterness of her words stung him. Moreover, it was not easy to remain tragic in face of so undignified an incident. So he looked up and said—

“Mock me; I deserve it. So you have heard of that too?”

“Who hasn’t? Mrs. Kinneston was dancing all over London last night with her new hair and her comic excuse for it. No wonder the papers are making us their butt! To-

morrow the same vulgar jesters will be pretending our creed is the best substitute for hair dye."

Unable to endure her upbraidings longer, Eustace rose to his feet and looked at her entreatingly.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "even you can be cruel and relentless when the arrow has struck your pride. But of what account to me are the impious follies of Mrs. Kinneston, or the vanities of Lady Elsmuir? I defy them."

"But I warned you against Lady Elsmuir, with her spurious cures, her wild ignorance, her doubtful associates," exclaimed Mrs. Galbraith, "but you would not listen."

"What I did I did for the best," retorted Eustace. "I hoped to help those people just as you, with the absolute certainty of unsuccess before you, are attempting to save Mr. Selby. It was his daughter told me we were—what was it?—'staggering toward a farce.'"

But the gathering cloud on Mrs. Galbraith's brow told Eustace he was skirmishing over dangerous ground; he made a gallant dash to less recriminatory fields of appeal.

"But forgive me!" he exclaimed; "I have passed a night of fever, of misery, of half-aimless prayer. If the fault is mine, let the atonement be mine too. I trusted too much in my own unaided strength and judgment. My rash reference in the *Torch* to the man Cranley has been the cause of all this trouble. My instinct was wrong, yours right. But how could I believe the credulity even of smart people would carry them into such a welter, or that a woman who has had the benefit of the Wiggpole Street teaching could be deluded by wild tales of talismans and magic stones?"

"Lord Elsmuir has always been a collector," said Mrs. Galbraith, relieved to find that Eustace was confessing an error rather than insisting on his own unfaltering wisdom. He

saw the change in her, and resumed his attitude of repentance with all the appealing grace at his command.

“Yes, I have been unwise, lamentably unwise,” he continued; “trusting too much, weighing too little; miscalculating human weakness, over-valuing the love of spiritual truth in others; making too small an allowance for human vanity; and now I am overwhelmed with shame. The blow has fallen on me—on me alone, and my pride is shattered. I have lost so much faith, not in our creed—oh, no! that can never be—but in man’s power to use it. When I stood on the platform last night I felt calamity gathering. There was that awful woman with her bronze hair, the malignant Selby, the vain and frivolous Lady Elsmuir, the coarse adventurer Cranley—each of them, it seemed, like witches in *Macbeth*, preparing a poison for our growing Church, that little plant of fragrant growth that you alone have helped me tend, you with

your great faith, your limitless trust in human goodness——” Here tears filled Eustace’s large eyes and broke the music of his voice.

“But the pity of it is,” he cried, “that the worst blow to the honor and dignity of the Church in Wiggpole Street is due to my mismanagement. I can never forgive myself.”

Eustace sank back in the chair, pressed his beautiful hands over his face, and wept.

And his tears touched Mrs. Galbraith’s heart, washing all her resentment away. She saw his repentance; where repentance has entered she knew that atonement must follow.

“Don’t weep, Eustace, my friend,” she said; “if you have erred, it is not through want of faith or of spiritual conviction——”

“No! no!” he interrupted; “through spiritual loneliness. I am alone in the world; no other tender heart next my own to share its sorrows, to encourage its doubts.”

And through his tears he kissed the hand

which, with a motherly gesture, she held to him in token of forgiveness.

A silence fell over the room for a moment, and in it Eustace felt that he was forgiven, and that he would not be called upon to resign his position as Director of New Christian Pathology (D.N.C.P.) to the community in Wiggpole Street—a position assuring him a means of comfortable, even of luxurious, living.

At last, when Eustace, with a sigh of relief, felt able to speak, he said sweetly—

“Then you do forgive me—you who trusted me so much—for this shameful blunder?”

“Yes,” she said, “I forgive you.”

“It now remains to see how it may be repaired,” said Eustace.

“What do you propose?” she asked.

“Never to mention the Healing Stones nor the man Cranley in our paper, to make no reference to their existence; in fact, to persuade myself and others that they have no existence.”

“But what of exposing him as a charlatan?” asked Mrs. Galbraith.

“The danger is this,” said Eustace, who had now completely recovered his composure, “when a lady of Lady Elsmuir’s position fully believes that she has wrought a miracle, it is impossible to persuade her that she is mistaken—it is equally difficult to persuade her friends, especially if they are her social inferiors and are interested in such things—that, to put it coarsely, she has been humbugged.”

“Mr. Selby says the thing is clear,” said Mrs. Galbraith, “and that Lady Elsmuir has been outrageously deceived.”

Eustace winced. He hated Selby worse than he disliked Cranley, with whom he could remotely sympathize.

“How is it clear?” he asked.

“‘Given a magic stone,’ he said, ‘an impostor like Cranley, a vain woman like Lady Elsmuir, and imagine a confederate in Mrs. Palgrave, and you can have as many miracles

as you like.' He undertakes to expose the whole thing if I will let him."

Mrs. Galbraith summed up the points with an air that made Eustace nervous. He feared Mrs. Galbraith was jealous of Lady Elsmuir's reputation as a rival Healer, and saw troubles in the brutal interference Selby offered.

"Such intervention as Mr. Selby's," Eustace objected, "might easily bring the affair before a police magistrate. You and I might be called as witnesses; our desire for justice might make the last of the scandal worse than the first."

"That is true," replied Mrs. Galbraith, "and so I told Mr. Selby. There is only one thing to be done. You must ask Lady Elsmuir to leave our branch of the New Christian Pathologists."

Eustace felt himself turning pale. He seemed to see Cranley daring him with the horrible check.

"Request her to leave?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"But then, there is her subscription. She is not illiberal. We shall miss that."

"I will double mine if she goes," replied Mrs. Galbraith.

"Then there is the social prestige she confers on Wigpole Street," urged Eustace.

"We shall be better without that. She has brought us in touch with a set whose support is a moral danger. The warning you gave last night was sorely needed."

"But do you think it is my place to request her to—eh—go?" asked Eustace timidly.

"Yes, I do—most certainly."

"But I would rather not. Could not you undertake it—you who are so fearless in any good work, so strong and gentle? Surely it is your work?"

"You don't know what that sort of woman is capable of," replied Mrs. Galbraith, unshaken by the appeal. "She would simply insist that I was jealous."

"That would be of no consequence. We

all know you are incapable of jealousy. You would simply tell her that we all thought at Wiggpole Street that she must decide between Us and the Sacred Stones; that an equal faith in both was spiritually impossible, and that the mixing up the cures in the reckless way she threatened is intolerable."

"What you suggest ought to be said," replied Mrs. Galbraith, "but it must be said officially by the D.N.C.P. Lady Elsmuir would laugh in my face. It is your duty to speak to her, especially as you are responsible for what has occurred."

And although Eustace's heart was beating nervously at the prospect, he remembered his own powers of steering through difficulties. Might he not speak to Lady Elsmuir without offending her and, what was far more dangerous, without offending Cranley?

"Then I *will* speak to Lady Elsmuir," he said.

"You will be firm with her?"

"Most firm," he answered, and rose to go. "This is the saddest interview you and I ever had."

"Perhaps we both needed a lesson," she answered. "I have been lax and you too careless of our highest interests."

"Alas for our poor human inadvertence!" he sighed.

"But let us forget it. Stay to lunch. Octavia will be pleased to see you."

"I cannot stay now."

"Then dine with us, as a sign of reconciliation."

She gave him her cool, white hand. He pressed it affectionately, and said—

"Thank you. I will come to dinner."

Then he left the house and stepped into the first gleam of sunshine.

The painful interview was over. He had not lost. On the contrary, he had refused an invitation to lunch and accepted an invitation to dinner. His serenity was restored.

Eustace smiled to himself.

“I wonder what she really does think of me? How beautifully sympathetic she is! Still, I feel dreadfully shaken.”

A smart hansom was passing. Eustace hailed it—the moment was past for the depreciatory 'bus—and drove back to his rooms.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT Octavia Lee during her visit to Mrs. Galbraith had seen of the inner workings of the New Christians painfully and strangely enlightened her.

Whilst Mrs. Galbraith had deeply interested her and won her warmest regard, Eustace Fenner's dexterous handling of the new dogmas, after first dazzling her, ended in exciting her suspicions. Was the man a charlatan, or the victim of his own vain fanaticism? The doubt worried Octavia.

Mrs. Galbraith and Octavia had arrived at Wigpole Street ten minutes before Eustace appeared, and found the gathering members of the congregation in a state of pleasurable anticipation. The story of the miracle of the Bronze Hair was already known, and Mrs. Kinneston was believed (erroneously, as it

transpired) to be about to stand up before them all to bear testimony to Mr. Cranley's Sacred Stones.

Lady Elsmuir was already there, "talking," as Mrs. Galbraith said, "nonsense." Surrounded by a group of friends, her ladyship was explaining the virtues of the stones. Although she did not expect them to supersede their system of Mind Cure, she was convinced they might be of great assistance to any practitioner lucky enough to acquire possession of one. Then she drew the stone from her pocket, and amid a chorus of "Oh, do let me look!" displayed the treasure to all near enough to see.

When a few minutes later Mrs. Kinneston and her new bronze hair arrived, she became the center of an amused but politely distrustful circle. Octavia heard her say, "Of course, I don't intend to speak, but you may take it from me that the thing did happen. Believe it or not, as you like."

The intrusion of such dubious experiences, however, deeply annoyed Mrs. Galbraith and other serious Believers. Octavia began to suspect that the Wigpole Street community was in danger of splitting into two cliques—one anxious to ignore the very existence of other forms of Faith Cure but their own, the other ready to argue that, if you could Mind Cure by mere force of will—for after all that was what it came to, whatever you called it—why shouldn't you obtain equally good results by believing Mr. Cranley's stones capable of doing what was claimed for them? It wasn't fair, the latter insisted, to limit power of faith just to suit your own peculiar creed.

“Their vanity is driving them to the extremity of folly!” Mrs. Galbraith said, refusing all discussion.

But Octavia was sorry to see her friend's disappointment, and for the first time it occurred to her how melancholy was the spectacle of so admirable a woman struggling to

believe the impossible outside the regions of common sense.

Driving home after the meeting, Octavia said to her friend, "Why do not you, who believe so deeply in all that is good and beautiful, leave all those conceited people and their preposterous cranks to smother in their own absurdity?"

"My dear!" Mrs. Galbraith replied, "even the silliest of them may be struggling toward the light, and I feel I can help them."

"Ah!" thought Octavia. "She feels she can help them. That is her illusion, poor dear!"

And suddenly she seemed to have strayed into a world filled by the victims of illusions.

When Eustace left, Mrs. Galbraith went to the drawing-room to Octavia. The scene with the young man, his complex emotions, his agile intellect, had fatigued her. By contrast Octavia's serenity seemed very sweet and reposeful. She likened her to the blos-

som of a beautiful white-thorn dying in a desert land for want of water.

When Octavia talked of returning home, Mrs. Galbraith begged her to stay on, till Octavia, remembering the lonely weeks in the early spring at the Red House, agreed to prolong her visit to the middle of July.

Mrs. Galbraith did not actually say to herself, "If Octavia leave me without being converted I must find her a good husband," but this idea, although unadmitted, overshadowed her mind. She had schemes to help or comfort most of her friends. Eustace, with wider experience and ripened intellect, was to write the great work—the work for which the world was waiting—on Faith and Pathology. She saw what was good in others with a generous eye, and even when virtue was absent, supplied it from the depths of her own charity. Thus Octavia seemed an agnostic angel; Eustace, a beautiful soul not yet sure of its flight; John Selby, a man in whom the sur-

face-ice concealed an amiable nature congealed in solitude. Even if Lady Elsmuir had come to her and cried, "I am a vain woman, whose powers as a healer are ridiculous because of my feeble faith, let me be your friend," she would have trusted her for ever afterward.

Octavia, instinctively feeling this charm of tenderness and trust, loved her friend better every day. "She wants to help me so badly," she thought, "but in some things I can help her."

They stood by the window and watched the gold of the sunbeam, which had cheered Eustace, deepening across the trees. The wind had changed from the damp west, and the breath of the keener north was clearing the sky.

"Let us go for a walk," said Mrs. Galbraith, "and forget all bothers."

So they dressed and started down the long avenue for the Row. The grass was drying,

the thrushes were singing in the flowering chestnuts, the Serpentine shone bluely up at a sky dappled with roving cloud. The religion of the world seemed to Octavia far healthier than the mangled metaphysics taught in Wigpole Street, but she kept carefully off such topics, and the two friends walked side by side, for the most part in silence, under the flickering shadow of the trees.

When they reached the Wild Corner, Octavia saw her father and Major King leaning over the railings watching the riders.

John Selby had followed them back to Mrs. Galbraith's on the previous evening, bent, as Octavia felt, on making as much mischief as he could. He had suggested "the showing up" of Mr. Cranley and his stones, and while secretly enjoying the miracle of Mrs. Kinneston's hair—Mrs. Kinneston was an acquaintance whose sense of humor he much admired—had agreed with Mrs. Galbraith in deploring her levity.

Octavia felt no pleasure in meeting her father, whose attitude toward Mrs. Galbraith she already suspected, but she was glad to see Major King. Like the happy woodpigeons in the trees, and the sleek horses cantering over the Ride, he was so simple and unpretentious—such a contrast to Mrs. Galbraith's dubious sect!

The Major and Selby had met by chance in Piccadilly, and had strolled together into the Park. Selby had just finished telling the former of the latest miracles in Wigpole Street—of Mrs. Palgrave's cure, of the "miracle of the bronze hair," and of "the comic debate" that wound up a "really splendid farce."

Major King was less amused than Selby expected.

"Seems a pity your daughter should be mixed up in all this rubbish," he said; "it would have worried poor Lee into fits."

"Well, it won't worry him now," said Selby, "and it won't affect Octavia. Besides, what

on earth does it matter what women believe?"

"I think it matters a great deal," said the Major. He turned away a little irritably from his companion, as he added, "and I can't help thinking some one ought to look after your daughter a bit. Mrs. Galbraith's a brick, and all that, only—well, you know, she has notions of things which are a premium on imposture."

"My dear fellow, I am looking after them both," said Selby, pompously protective; "only in my own way. You've been in India too long. Try to be more modern."

"Why, there they are!" exclaimed Major King, as he saw Octavia and Mrs. Galbraith coming toward them.

He turned round to greet them.

"Turned out a lovely day, hasn't it?" said the Major, shaking hands with the ladies. "Met your father in Piccadilly, so we came for a stroll."

After a few words they walked up the Row together, Selby with Mrs. Galbraith leading the way.

The Major felt himself in the position of a man who wanted to say something but found difficulty in saying it. However, his talk with Selby had given him a sort of clue.

"Your father and I were just speaking of you, Mrs. Lee," he began. "I understand you are to stay with Mrs. Galbraith six or seven weeks?"

"Yes, she insists—she is so kind," replied Octavia.

"Of course you're clever and all that sort of thing, Mrs. Lee, and I'm only a soldier—a member of the stupid class, you know."

"Why stupid class?" asked Octavia, to parry the attack which she had been suspecting.

"Why, don't you read the papers?" he asked.

"Yes, especially the military intelligence."

“Ah! we look stupidest in the leading articles, you know. They have decided the British officer is just a bumptious variant of the average British idiot, without intelligence enough to convoy an apple cart across Pall Mall; and of course it isn't for fellows like us to advise clever young women.”

“Why don't you write to the papers and say soldiers *are* intelligent enough to convoy apple carts across Pall Mall,” answered Octavia, laughing, “and claim a fair standard of intellect for the Army?”

“Because to contradict the Press is to insult it; you may insult the Government as much as you like, but to speak disrespectfully of the newspapers is the dangerous form of treason. But all this has nothing to do with what I wanted to say.”

“I'm not so sure,” said Octavia. “I've just discovered we all live in a world of illusions. You can't expect newspapers to es-

cape theirs. They believe they hold the key to all knowledge."

"Well, they've discovered the Army is an unorganized idiot asylum! I'd like to have the whole lot of fussy little scribblers in my battery!"

"What! To cure their illusions by blowing them off at the muzzle of your guns," said she, "as you want to cure mine, although I've none."

"How about this odd business in Wiggole Street, where, according to your father, they turn gray hair bronze, cure diphtheria with magic stones, and work miracles while you wait? You're too good for that sort of nonsense, Mrs. Lee, and I do wish you'd drop it. That's what I wanted to say."

"I knew you did," she said, "and it's kind to be anxious about me, but my incredulity is terribly tough, and I'm very fond of Mrs. Galbraith."

"Oh, she's a good sort, I know."

"She is much more than that, and somehow I feel I can help her."

"That's just what she feels about you."

"So she can, and does."

"How?"

"By—well—just by liking me."

"Of course she's fond of you," he said warmly; "there's no great virtue in that. But how on earth can you help her?"

"By protecting her, for the most part indirectly, against impostors. Somebody says incredulity is the vice of a fool, credulity the defect of a man of intelligence. In some aspects her faith is beautiful—in its belief in the goodness of the world, for instance—in other things she is a visionary, but never absurd, because of her absolute sincerity. She is half a child, half an angel, and wholly lovable. How, then, can my friendship with such a woman do me anything but good?"

"You do stand up for your friends!" said he, impressed by her warmth of manner.

"No doubt Mrs. Galbraith *is* a contrast to the selfish people one generally knocks up against," here his eye fell unconsciously on the back of Mr. Selby's neat frock coat; "but how about some of her associates? That fellow with the long hair and glib tongue I met at dinner the other night, for instance."

"Mr. Fenner?"

"Yes."

"I'm not certain about him. He may be sincere."

"If he's sincere, he's an ass; if he isn't, he's a humbug."

"That's too sweeping. He may be only a visionary with a practical side."

"You should hear what your father says of him."

"I have; he's uncharitable. You should hear what Mrs. Galbraith says."

"What does Fenner believe in?" asked the Major.

Octavia reflected. Eustace Fenner's beliefs were difficult to grasp. He believed so much.

"He believes," she said, "and I'm quoting him very crudely, 'that all the phenomena of the Universe are in some way continuous, and that they can be harmoniously connected by aid of mysterious agencies, which, grouped together, may be defined as Faith.'"

"That doesn't mean anything. What doesn't he believe in, then?"

"He doesn't believe in Mr. Cranley's Healing Stones, about which there has been such a fuss, or in the miracle of Mrs. Kinneson's bronze hair, in which, of course, she doesn't believe either. There are limits to his credulity, I assure you."

"I should like to know the limits to his dishonesty," said the Major; "I never see him without thinking of that chap in the old French play."

"Tartuffe. You are unfair to him, Major King," she insisted.

"I hope I am, for Mrs. Galbraith's sake. There's one thing more I must say, Mrs. Lee."

"What is that?"

"You won't think me interfering?"

"No, of course not. You have an old friend's right to tell me what you please."

"Thank you. It's this. Don't let him get too thick with you."

Octavia smiled at the idea.

"He isn't likely to wish to be."

"I'm not sure. You can never be certain of long-haired fellows with impossible religions and gangs of female disciples!"

But they had reached the limits of the Ride; Selby and Mrs. Galbraith stopped. The hour of lunch was approaching.

Mrs. Galbraith glanced at Octavia. She saw that she had enjoyed the walk; her own sense of contentment was increased by her

friend's growing cheerfulness. John Selby's nature, moreover, had appeared less metallic than usual. When she struck against the brass the vibratory defiances seemed less blatant. Moral atrophy, she hoped, was not yet complete. The mood prompting her in the pleasant June sunshine was a sanguine one.

"Mr. Selby has consented to dine with us to-night," said she to Major King.

"But I'm always dining with you!" interrupted Selby; "you will end in having too much of the family, my dear Mrs. Galbraith!"

He felt he was making progress.

Mrs. Galbraith shook her head and continued, "And I do hope you will come too, Major King."

While the Major hesitated, she added—

"I dislike formal dinner-parties, and rarely give them. Only Mr. Fenner will be there besides ourselves. Do come!"

"Thank you, I'll come with pleasure," said

the Major. "I should much like to see Mr. Fenner again."

Then they separated. The Major and Selby walking in the direction of Piccadilly, the ladies returning home to lunch.

CHAPTER XV

WHILST Major Raymond King and Octavia Lee were speaking of Eustace Fenner in the Row, the latter was walking in Bond Street seeking a policy at once worthy of himself, useful to the fortunes of his Church, and inoffensive to Lady Elsmuir.

He was pledged to ask her to leave a community on which the shadow of her station fell, Eustace thought, not unbecomingly. How could this be done without making her angry? Surely there must be a means.

If it were a question of offending Lady Elsmuir or Mrs. Galbraith, her ladyship must be sacrificed. Unfortunately he feared that if he yielded too much to his virtuous indignation there would be risk of arousing the unscrupulous Cranley's vindictiveness. Cranley, he suspected, had an ally—a less liberal-minded

man would have said a confederate—in Mrs. Palgrave, in whom Lady Elsmuir rashly confided.

For some time Eustace could see no policy offering success in the three requisite directions. What was wanted was a neat plan to induce Lady Elsmuir to leave the Wigpole Street community of her own accord. Could this be found in the existing situation? At first Eustace felt so far below his ideal as to contemplate throwing himself on Cranley's mercy, under the pretense of seeking his advice. But he knew Cranley would make him eat humble pie—he was such a coarse creature, an adventurer whose base mechanical methods never deserved to prosper, and whose success would have been impossible but for Eustace's misplaced generosity.

The harassed New Christian saw his error of judgment only when too late. Nothing is more pathetic than the enlightenment which comes too late. What a simple escape had

been concealed from him! He might have announced from the platform how a friend had entrusted him with £500 to be given to the most deserving charity, and have added that it was his, Eustace's, intention to pay it into the N. C. P. fund. What a shock to Cranley's greed this would have been! After the generous act he might have confessed his money troubles—at least to a graceful extent—to the supporters of the Church. They, in all human probability, would have helped him. The committee might even have discovered that the best use for the said £500 was the disembarassment of the private affairs of "the eloquent and able teacher to whom all New Christians owe so much."

In his imagination Eustace heard Mrs. Galbraith, in the name of the Committee, uttering these graceful words. But, alas! these empty dreams. The £500 had already been swallowed up. It is but a futile solace to reconstruct in the imagination what has hap-

pened in reality. Even with the most highly endowed natures it can serve as a feeble anodyne dreamily consoling only when danger is remote.

Yet surely there must be means of escape—somewhere.

Eustace sauntered on vainly clutching for one—feeling it there if he could only see it. “If only I had a Healing Stone of St. Peter,” he thought, “I would try that.”

We never know when aid is at hand, nor whence it comes.

The thought, born of contempt though it was, sent a wave of elation through him.

He knew that the Sacred Stones, flung figuratively at the heads of people prepared to believe anything, had already created a division among his own congregation—a division which ought not to be wasted.

Lady Elsmuir was the most powerful and ambitious rebel against the authority which Mrs. Galbraith rightly, Eustace considered,

desired should prevail in Wigpole Street. Had it not now become her ladyship's duty to secede and form, under her own leadership, a new community to be called—yes, obviously to be called “The Companions of St. Peter”?

Light had come at last. Lady Elsmuir would, of course, be founder and inventor of the sect. She need only ask Cranley to draw up a few rules for the spiritual guidance of members, send in her resignation to Wigpole Street, and leave Eustace once more free to care for the highest interests of his flock.

“It must come off. I feel it must,” said Eustace to himself, and so sanguine was he that he hurried off to the Tepidarium Club, where he drank a pint of champagne at lunch. It was many days since his heart had felt so light. Rosier gleams were falling on troubles undeserved yet meekly borne.

He would call on Lady Elsmuir that afternoon and set the train of ideas in motion. In the evening, at dinner, he would be able to

tell Mrs. Galbraith how manfully his most painful duty had been performed, how he had provided against the dangerous spirit which the levity of Lady Elsmuir and her friends threatened to bring into the councils of Wigpole Street.

At four o'clock the footman showed Eustace into Lady Elsmuir's boudoir, where she received him in consequence of a request which he sent over the telephone from the club, asking for a private interview to discuss a question of the highest spiritual import.

Lady Elsmuir, who loved to feel herself moving among the mysteries, far above the uninspired sportswomen and pleasure-seekers of her class, looked forward, on her side, to some fresh religious excitement of a flattering nature.

Her room was aching with the elaborate simplicity of pale green silk hangings, delicate white paint, and polished floor, islanded with snowy bearskin rugs. On a table stood a sin-

gle bowl of beautiful, pink roses; near them, in a pale blue morning dress of lawn, sat Lady Elsmuir. A fashionable painter, who had never learned to draw, but who, in consequence, had portrait commissions from most of the fashionable ladies of the moment, to whom he did ample justice in six feet of the most elegant oil-paint, had once told Lady Elsmuir that amid the soft lights of her boudoir she was his ideal of the Mortal in Matthew Arnold's *Forsaken Merman* "enshrined amid memories of the abandoned sea home."

To this illusive ideal Lady Elsmuir endeavored to attain, with the constant aid of her sympathetic house decorator. The last effort had been "amber and pearl." The present decorations were a submarine compromise. The wife of the "Forsaken Merman" had just lost a little of her first longing for "the cool sea caves."

Eustace, who knew the meaning of the room, and who, as he admitted, had "a pas-

sion for imaginative upholstery," was flattered by a reception suggesting on Lady Elsmuir's part a complete grasp of the importance of his visit.

"It was most kind of you to receive me, Lady Elsmuir," said he.

"I knew you wouldn't have telephoned unless you had something important to say," she replied.

"I certainly should not," he said. "The fact is, we are approaching a crisis in Wigpole Street—in consequence of our last discussion, I mean."

"About my Sacred Stone?" inquired Lady Elsmuir. "For it is mine now. Mrs. Galbraith's very unpleasant manner prepared me for a row. It's time she understood, Mr. Fenner, that I intend to practise Christian Pathology just as I like. You know my views. They're quite as good as hers."

"Of course! of course! That is why I presumed to telephone to you. I have had

what I may almost call a vision concerning you."

"A vision, Mr. Fenner?"

"Let us call it spiritual enlightenment, Lady Elsmuir. It came on me in Bond Street, of all places in the world, outside the big jeweler's shop. I chanced to look in. My eyes fell on a beautiful diamond cross, which, perhaps, set the train of thought working. As I walked slowly toward Piccadilly, plunged, I suppose, in a reverie—for I was unconscious of the movements about me—the diamond cross seemed to shine in my brain. You will understand the feeling, Lady Elsmuir."

"Perfectly. Diamonds which don't belong to one have a way of shining in one's brain. There's nothing supernatural in that."

"But the mental phenomenon in my case," resumed Eustace, with a faint ripple of asperity in his voice, "was in no way connected with the desire of possession or with any cov-

etous sense. Rather was it entirely altruistic. For soon the diamonds disappeared from my mind-picture, and I seemed to see the Sacred Healing Stone with the Greek legend shining out clearly with a lambent and liquid light. Behind it appeared your face, dim and shadowy, above a scroll whereon these words were inscribed: 'Companion of St. Peter.'

"How very interesting!" exclaimed Lady Elsmuir. "But what did I have on?"

"Your face alone visible—faintly luminous through the soft mind-cloud," answered Eustace, "was transfigured and spiritualized, if I may say so."

But Lady Elsmuir felt a nervous shudder run through her blood. Were not such visions ominous? Eustace Fenner had a good deal of the seer about him.

"But it's a warning!" she exclaimed anxiously, "a warning! You saw my wraith. It doesn't mean that I am going to——"

But Eustace interrupted her.

"My dear Lady Elsmuir," he said, "cannot you see its significance? It's *so* clear."

("She's a very stupid woman," he reflected, annoyed at her want of spiritual insight. "Mrs. Galbraith would have guessed at once.")

"Well, it isn't clear to me," she answered, "but rather frightening, and I really must ask you to explain."

"The vision was obviously a case of auto-suggestion," said Eustace. "The diamond cross suggested the idea of your Sacred Stone; the Sacred Stone called up the vision of its worthiest possessor; the scroll with the words 'Companion of St. Peter,' the name of the new Order which must be formed with the object of utilizing St. Peter's Healing Stones as the newest instruments in New Christian Therapeutics. To me it is all so plain," he added a little wearily.

"You mean," said Lady Elsmuir, listening excitedly, "that I am pointed out as the chosen vessel for this work."

"Assuredly," said Eustace, "and I feel that you will not hesitate before so serious a call."

"But what ought I to do? How ought I to begin?"

("She is indeed a dull woman," Eustace reflected.)

"It is clear that there is a supernatural demand for the Order of which the name has been revealed to me; it is equally clear that you have been chosen for the work. Before beginning you should consult Mr. Cranley, who can assist you in a subordinate character. There is another point which is also clear: in accepting the new duties you must lead, not follow. It will therefore become necessary for you to quit our community in Wigpole Street. There is not room for two such strenuous workers as yourself and Mrs. Galbraith, a great woman and a good, no doubt, but jealous withal of spiritual rivalry. In fact, if you both continue in Wigpole Street, each will neutralize the power for good in the

other by the introduction of the spirit of human rivalry. The Secret Powers have called upon you, Lady Elsmuir. Your duty is plain."

Lady Elsmuir was deeply impressed as well as relieved: the real interpretation of Mr. Fenner's vision was flattering, not dangerous.

"I will," she said, "see what can be done."

"I felt," he said, "that you would not be wanting."

"I will send for Mr. Cranley this afternoon," she continued thoughtfully.

"But you must be cautious with him," said Eustace. "Mr. Cranley must understand that the idea sprang entirely from you. The warning was clear. You are the Founder and discoverer of the New Order. You need only tell him of the scheme thus indirectly revealed to you. Its value will appeal to him at once. Some such Order as that which you are about to recreate existed among the

now extinct tribe from the last member of which he rescued the Stones. You are simply renewing a great beneficent Power which has been in existence for nineteen hundred years. But promise not to mention my name, except, of course, to Mr. Cranley. If you do, I feel the spell will be broken."

"I promise," said Lady Elsmuir.

"There is one point more," resumed Eustace. "You must resign your membership in Wigpole Street at once."

"Why? I see no reason for haste."

"Mrs. Galbraith declares you have not spiritual courage enough to practise healing except under her wing."

"What ridiculous vanity!" cried Lady Elsmuir. "How about Mrs. Palgrave? And only last month I cured the milkman's boy of warts. His hand was covered with them."

"I know, I know," replied Eustace quickly, for reference to cures always made him nervous. "Mrs. Galbraith ought not to have said

so, and so I told her. But we are all imperfect—even the best of us. What I have said is in the strictest confidence, and I am sure will go no further. Your clear duty is to resign; much as I shall miss your support in Wiggpole Street, I must tell you so, for your call is now elsewhere.”

“Are you sure of that, Mr. Fenner?”

“Perfectly!”

“Then I will send in my resignation tonight,” said Lady Elsmuir. “Mrs. Galbraith shall see that I can walk alone, and in greater comfort, too, free from her patronage.”

“I felt you would decide wisely, Lady Elsmuir,” said Eustace, rising to go. “A vast enterprise lies before you. Though our paths diverge, they lead to the same goal.”

“I dare say I shall get on all right,” replied her ladyship. “I will send for Mr. Cranley at once. He can do the rough part of the work, you know.”

“Certainly,” Eustace replied; “in all labor

there must be the hewer of wood and the drawer of water. I trust Mr. Cranley will be fitted for his share in the task."

Then Eustace withdrew, leaving Lady Elsmuir to her meditations. They were not yet of a perfectly clear character.

"I'm in the thick of it," she said to herself. "I suppose it's all right. Certainly it's odd and interesting."

Walking quietly through the sunny streets, Eustace enjoyed the satisfaction which even the most modest of us derive from the sense of a difficult piece of work neatly accomplished. Like the cricketer who has carried out his bat after a faultless innings, he felt that he, too, in his quiet, finished way, could afford to admire his own style. Had he not saved his Church from scandal by freeing it from elements of dangerous discord? Had he not got rid of Lady Elsmuir without offending her, and started her, with Cranley as her adviser, on a perfectly innocent wild-

goose chase, which, at least, would keep her out of mischief? But, best of all, he had disarmed Cranley by providing him with a possible means of livelihood. Eustace expected no gratitude, but thought he might now rely on the other's benevolent neutrality.

The risks through which he had steered so cleverly—now part of his own experience—stood out as a serious warning. The lesson had been learned. A disaster might fling him unprovided for on a pitiless world. As he crossed Piccadilly he beheld a dismal procession of sandwich-men wandering toward the Circus; one or two of them still exhibited melancholy signs of better days. "Look at the Other Side" was the legend printed on their weary backs. Eustace did, and read, "Nubbs's Amazing Cocoa is the Best!"

What, Eustace asked himself, protected him from similar gutter ignominy? Only the confidence of the New Christians and the income thereby derived, inadequate for his

wants though it was! What a precarious tenure of insufficient prosperity was thus suggested!

The only way to happiness led through the gates of a worthy marriage, portals still relentlessly closed against him.

But why were they closed?

Because he had never knocked long enough nor loud enough.

If youth were receding, so were the follies and weaknesses obstructing its fullest enjoyment!

CHAPTER XVI

EUSTACE was handing the servant his light summer overcoat, a garment of quiet gray lined with silk of the same color, when Mrs. Galbraith, who had heard him ring, came down to the hall to meet him.

Her quick eye perceived that her guest was pleased with himself.

They mounted the stairs together.

"I have just discharged a most unpleasant duty," said Eustace—"requested Lady Elsmuir to resign."

"How did she take it? Was she offended?" asked Mrs. Galbraith, more hurriedly than her wont.

"Yes—that is, at first. But I pointed out to her how impossible it was for her to pretend to practise our system and dally at the same time with the dangerous foolishness which the

man Cranley has provided. I also said how much I regretted being compelled to speak."

"What did she say?" asked Mrs. Galbraith.

"That there could be no distinction in faith-cures whatever the agency used, and that the same working of the brain produced in all cases the same result. I replied that the very fact that she held such a view proved her unfittedness to belong to Us—for I perceived that she was quoting from Charcot or some other of the pseudo-scientific charlatans who insist on complete similarity between lay and religious faith-cures and deny the overmastering power of Virtue as the dominant factor. She, however, was obdurate; but I was very firm, and finally she consented to resign rather than recant and cease her experiments with Cranley's Stones. I expect her letter to-morrow. I was sorry for her, as she was naturally most reluctant to leave us."

"What does she propose to do?"

"I'm not sure," answered Eustace; "practise as a Healer, with the help of Mr. Cranley, I suppose. I thought it wiser not to inquire. She must take her chance."

"I am glad you have done this," said Mrs. Galbraith approvingly. "At one time I feared for your moral courage."

"You need never fear for that when my duty is clear," replied Eustace. "It was you who pointed out that duty, and I thank you with all my heart. But oh, what a beautiful gown! Is that the last wonder from Faquin?"

Eustace flew off at an enthusiastic tangent. She was wearing a charming dinner dress of white chiffon, decorated with a faint tracery of flowers and leaves painted on the delicate fabric, and revealing the candid beauty of her shoulders and rounded arms.

"You ought to scold, not encourage me," she said; "but it tempted me so that I bought it. I'm too old for such vanities!"

"Do not disparage your own beauty and

grace. To cherish and keep them is the secret and glory of our creed," said Eustacé. "Beauty is a divine gift, which only the halt and lame of the moral world dare to underrate. No; the Greeks were right!"

He opened for her the door of the drawing-room before which they had lingered a moment: Mrs. Galbraith entered. Her own figure floated upon her from a mirror; she felt, without vanity, that Eustacé's praise was deserved. For her mature beauty now seemed an almost impersonal possession, to be cherished and tended with methodic care as the mortal of an immortal spirit.

Octavia Lee, reading on a couch in the recess, rose as they entered.

"What two beautiful women!" mused Eustacé. "How delightful to dine with them alone in the soothing atmosphere created by their charming presence and sweet manner!"

But the daily paths of most of us are strewn with unexpected disappointments.

When Mrs. Galbraith told Eustace that Major King and Mr. Selby were expected, Octavia Lee saw his smooth face, with all the contradictory elements of character which she thought she read thereon, change as the invading disturbance routed its complacency.

"You have had a tiring day, Mr. Fenner," she said, mistaking the cause.

"Not unusually," he replied.

"Major King said he was anxious to meet you again," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"How nice of him!" said Eustace, "and I who understand soldiers so ill too!"

"They are such simple creatures!" said Octavia, faintly annoyed.

"I know," he said, "I know. Grand fellows, of course. But oh, I wish we could do without them! Perhaps the success of our system will render them unnecessary in the future. Who knows? We are in the hands of the Great Enlightener."

For one of his pliancy at that moment Eus-

tace felt actually sulky. Mrs. Galbraith was no doubt a handsome woman and a well-meaning, but certainly she had the oddest notion of dinner-parties. Fancy asking him twice in succession to meet the same odious men—that wretched agnostic Selby, who mocked him, and the confounded Major, who looked on him as a mixture of crank and curate.

But Eustace could suffer unseen. Even as these resentful thoughts were vexing him, he turned to Octavia Lee, and (having from a previous glance among the music ascertained the fact) said as sweetly as he could, "I don't know, I'm not sure, Mrs. Lee, but I have a conviction that you are fond of Chopin."

"You shall hear Octavia after dinner," said Mrs. Galbraith.

But when the other guests arrived—the Major first, who monopolized Octavia's conversation—Eustace grew still more distressed at Mrs. Galbraith's want of tact. When

would she learn that the world wasn't the happy family she imagined it to be: where the canary roosts between the cat's whiskers and the white mouse nibbles the terrier's tail?

"She really makes me quite cross," he reflected. He might even have shown the shadow of his grievance had not John Selby provided him with a far more serious emotion.

The moment John Selby arrived he showed so evident a desire to talk with Eustace that Mrs. Galbraith, perceiving it, joined the Major and Octavia in the conservatory.

"What's the beast want with me!" Eustace wondered under correct, smiling brows.

"A fascinating woman that!" said Selby, in his low, even voice, as Mrs. Galbraith crossed the drawing-room to the adjoining conservatory. "A very fascinating woman, Mr. Fenner! But I needn't impress that on you."

"My oldest friend," replied Eustace, with dignity; "a pure and noble soul."

"No doubt," replied Selby. "I'm not an expert in souls. But since she's a friend, of course you're anxious no one else—I mean, nobody should humbug her."

"I know no woman less likely to be imposed upon than Mrs. Galbraith," replied Eustace. "Her intellect is swift, subtle, and penetrating."

"Yet she has great confidence in you, Mr. Fenner."

"Naturally; we have worked together for a considerable period with some success."

"But you very nearly brought the concern to grief by giving a 'leg up' to that fellow Cranley and his Sacred Stones," said Selby. "I am not exactly a religious man myself, but from what I saw and heard at the Wiggpole Street entertainment the other evening I fancied you had gone a bit too far."

Eustace felt his feet growing cold and his head hot.

"Mrs. Galbraith and myself both recog-

nized the error of judgment, for which I alone am responsible. Henceforth there will be no dealings between those who attribute divine influence to the Stones which Mr. Cranley is alleged to have discovered in Asia Minor and the latest doctrines of Christian Pathology as taught and practised in Wiggpole Street. But I understand, Mr. Selby, that you are an unbeliever—many of the acutest intellects of the age, alas! are, for such is the pride of human understanding. I fail, therefore, to see how the matter can interest you.”

“It interests me in this way. Mrs. Galbraith is a great friend of my daughter, and I don’t choose to see her imposed upon—unnecessarily, I mean, for, of course, we must all pay the average tribute to humbug.”

“Your tone makes me positively unhappy,” exclaimed poor Eustace, quite unprepared for so painful a conversation with this wrinkled-browed, cynical worldling.

“I was afraid it wouldn’t exactly make you

cheerful, Mr. Fenner," said Selby, "but that can't be helped. Certainly it isn't my fault. If this sort of thing goes on much longer I shall consider it my duty to show it up. Mr. Cranley had better be careful."

Eustace felt that he was growing pale.

"Mrs. Galbraith," he said, "has decided to have no more to do with Mr. Cranley."

"But Lady Elsmuir has been fool enough to buy one of his precious stones," said Selby.

"What of that? Lord Elsmuir is a collector of talismans, amulets, and that sort of thing," said Eustace as jauntily as he could.

- "Oh, I know he has drawers full of rubbish. But this last thing is guaranteed to work miracles. Lady Elsmuir has been done. As a joke it's capital fun, but as a business transaction, Mr. Fenner, it's—well, I hate strong language, so let us say—suspicious."

But here Eustace made one of his audacious dashes.

“Silly women like Lady Elsmuir,” he said, “must expect to be humbugged!”

“That’s the most practical remark I’ve ever heard you make, Mr. Fenner,” replied the inexorable Selby. “The question now is, whether you are to be my ally or opponent. I mean, if I think it worth while to try to show up this fellow Cranley as a public duty, or, in other words, for the fun of the thing.”

“A friend, of course,” murmured Eustace, through gathering cloud of panic.

“Thank you,” said Selby. “In that case, at a convenient time, perhaps you’ll tell me all you know about Mr. Cranley.”

“Nothing; absolutely nothing,” replied Eustace. “I wish I did.”

“That’s a pity,” said Selby, giving him a queer look. “It might help us.”

“It is indeed a pity, Mr. Selby. No doubt I ought to have been more on my guard. However, I must say I think it most

kind of you to have taken me into your confidence as you have done."

"I'm very glad you're pleased," said Selby. "But dinner's ready at last. Talking always makes me hungry."

The servant entering announced dinner, and Mrs. Galbraith, Octavia, and Major King came from the conservatory, where they had been examining the ferns.

"Three gentlemen to two ladies," said Mrs. Galbraith. "Come, Octavia, we'll lead the way."

The three men followed, Selby and Eustace last.

"We've had a very interesting chat, Mr. Fenner," said Selby.

"Very indeed," Eustace meekly replied. "Frankness is so refreshing and rare."

Eustace made brave efforts to take his share in the dinner-table talk, and though less brilliant than usual, held his own. After all, what Selby threatened was vague, and he

might easily steer through it. It was not until he was alone with the two men that he realized the reality of the danger in which his hostages to Cranley had involved him.

Octavia had been gracious to Major King, who felt so genial in consequence that he even made an attempt to be agreeable to Eustace, whom he looked on as "a ridiculous, posing ass."

"For the greater part of the last ten years," said the Major, "I've been in India. Since I left home all manner of clever things seem to have been invented. Among them this—what d'you call it?—New Christian Pathology. It appears there are a number of ladies practising it in India. I had a letter from a man last mail—he's on the Commander-in-Chief's staff. 'I wish you'd find out what this new religion is,' he said, 'who invented it, what are its doctrines.' Though I once went with Mrs. Galbraith to Wigpole Street, I'm so stupid that I came out as ignorant as

I went in. It occurred to me you might explain."

"I'm afraid one cannot explain an intricate science in a few minutes' after-dinner talk," replied Eustace; "but I will send you the little elementary book I prepared on the subject."

"Thanks," said the Major; "I'll forward it on to my friend to coach himself up. I've no gifts as an interpreter."

"If you really want to know what New Christian Pathology is," said Selby in his insolent voice, "you should come to me, Major."

"I didn't fancy that sort of thing was much in your line," said the other. "What's your view of it?"

"It's a creed invented, demonstrated, taught, and spread by a group of ignorant, emotional women; its doctrines are a jumble of spiritualism, mesmerism, mysticism, metaphysics, and 'clotted nonsense,' acceptable

only to people of imperfect sanity endowed with an intelligence incapable of grasping the most elementary scientific facts. That is Mr. Fenner's creed in a nutshell."

This brutal attack was followed by a painful silence, which Eustace broke with fine resentment.

"You have given your view with the ferocious candor of the completest ignorance, Mr. Selby. Yours is 'the spirit which denies'—the spirit most obstructive to moral progress in life. You claim that the creed is acceptable only to minds imperfectly balanced. Our hostess is a complete refutation of the ridiculous statement."

"She is the one exception to a most melancholy rule, Mr. Fenner," Selby replied.

For a moment Eustace looked across the flowers so wickedly that the Major almost expected him to fly at Selby's throat. But the New Christian had learned self-repression.

"Argument between us is absurd, Mr. Sel-

by," said Eustace; "besides, we are used to derision and contempt and are unmoved by it."

"Argument in such cases is a waste of time," interposed the Major, who felt that Selby had been unnecessarily rude, "and I must say on one side it has been overstrained. Let's join the ladies. I can hear your daughter playing her favorite Chopin, Selby. It reminds me of India."

The Major marched out of the room, the others followed.

"I don't think we need tell our hostess that we've had a difference of opinion, Mr. Fenner," said Selby, as they mounted the stairs.

"Quite unnecessary, I think," said Eustace. "It is one for which she must be prepared."

The evening passed as calmly as though no evil tempers had stirred across the dinner-table. Selby and Eustace instinctively hated each other, but with this difference: while the Christian Pathologist suffered acutely from

the cynic's personal presence, Selby enjoyed in the other's company a pleasure not unlike that excited in a terrier by a cat—the desire to worry, harass, bully, and maul. When, therefore, Selby was near him, Eustace, figuratively, was always up a tree.

After Octavia had played Chopin, Eustace, who had a fine sympathetic voice, sang "Adelaïde" to her accompaniment, and when the song was over he said he must go.

Guessing something had occurred to disturb Eustace by his manner, which had lost some of its gentle breeziness, Mrs. Galbraith accompanied him to the top of the stairs, where they stood a moment on the soft, deep carpet under the shade of the lamp.

"What has worried you, Eustace?" she asked kindly.

"Nothing, nothing," he said. "Only——" he hesitated and stopped.

"What is it? Tell me," she repeated.

"It's the impact of Mr. Selby's colossal un-

belief. It shakes my own faith. Let me entreat you to beware of it and of him—he's an awful man. I can't breathe in the same room with any one so icily wicked."

Eustace grew pale as he spoke.

"Never," he entreated, "ask me to meet him again, please."

"I'm so sorry he should have upset you," she said. "I ought to have guessed. Forgive me."

"Forgive you! You are the one lovable, beautiful soul in the world; to be with you after suffocating with him is like escaping to paradise out of an inferno terrible with memories of ancient crime. Selby is a man with a dumb soul. Good night."

"Good night," she said, as he hurried downstairs.

"A most agreeable young man," said Selby when she returned, "and of considerable taste in music. He sang 'Adelaïde' capitally. I've not heard it since Sims Reeves' day."

CHAPTER XVII

A FEW days after the dinner at Mrs. Galbraith's Eustace was sitting at his piano singing to dispel his gathering cares. The world was using him ill; there was a split in Wigpole Street. Lady Elsmuir had borne off with her in her wake not only all the followers she had brought, but several groups of waverers who had taken up the New Science because they thought it smart, and who were anxious not to be left out of her invitation list.

But artistic natures such as Eustace's find comfort where commoner souls vainly seek it. As he struck the chords he was unconsciously comparing himself with Tennyson's "Dying Swan." The sense of abandonment created by the ungrateful secessionists suggested the

parallel with that melancholy but magnificent bird.

And so he sat trying to fit the verse to music—a taste for improvisation being one of his most brilliant weaknesses.

“ ‘With an inner voice the river ran,’ ”

he sang, running into sorrowful minors—

“ ‘Adown it floated a dying swan.’ ”

Here the air struggled to become majestic and simple. By the time he had reached the third verse he had got into his stride.

“ ‘The wild swan’s death-hymn took the soul
Of that waste place with joy.’ ”

shouted Eustace, now thoroughly enjoying himself. “With joy,” he repeated, “hidden in sorrow—hidden in sorrow.” Here the difficulties of his pleasant task swarming round him, he omitted the rest of the line, and just when he seemed to have found his way in—

“ ‘The warble was low, and full and clear,’ ”

the servant opened the door and John Selby entered quietly.

But the artist, lost in his work, continued, unaware of the interruption, now trying backward for flowing phrases—

“ ‘ Above the wind was the swallow,
Chasing itself of its own sweet will—’ ”

Selby stood motionless behind the piano, basely enjoying the scene, until Eustace stopped his experimental chords and plaintive meanderings to turn over a page, and then the intruder said—

“Sorry to interrupt you at your studies, Mr. Fenner—chasing yourself, too, ‘ at your own sweet will,’ but your servant showed me in without announcement.”

As John Selby spoke, Eustace, in his pretty flowered-silk dressing-gown over a white waistcoat and nice gray trousers, wheeled round on the music-stool and fell with a moral crash from a bland, agreeable,

self-pitying mood into one of blank discomfort and apprehension.

A dryad, dreaming in her secret thicket, frightened by a furry-legged, goat-footed satyr, would have felt less horror than Eustace did.

However, he sprang to his feet, forced his face and reluctant lips into a genial smile, and said—

“Delighted to see you, Mr. Selby. *Dulce est desipere*. But do sit down; you know you have caught me playing the fool.”

“Not unseasonably, I hope,” said Selby, leaning back comfortably in Eustace’s arm-chair.

They looked at each other a moment in silence, Eustace preparing for unpleasantness.

“I hear there was a big falling off in your congregation at the last meeting, or service, or whatever you call it,” Selby began.

“Lady Elsmuir and her friends have with-

drawn," said Eustace. "Our ranks may be thinner, but they will be all the stronger for the absence of waverers."

"Your lot couldn't swallow the Sacred Stones, eh?" said Selby.

"The thing was too ridiculous—too preposterous for any intelligent New Christian to countenance," said Eustace.

"You admit this man Cranley is an impostor, then?" returned Selby quickly.

"Oh no, I admit nothing," answered Eustace.

"But you know he has sold a magic stone to Lady Elsmuir, who intends to play the fool with it in the usual manner; you know the stone has less virtue than an average piece of macadam?"

"But if Mr. Cranley believe in the virtue of the stones, however worthless they may be, there can be no question of *his* honesty," said Eustace benignantly.

"Then I understand you are willing to

believe in Cranley if he is ass enough to believe in his magic stones?"

"It is a brutally unfair way of putting it, but my answer is 'yes,'" said Eustace.

"Well, it's a fine effort of faith. You are willing, of course, to accept the risks involved in it?"

"There are no risks. I know nothing of Mr. Cranley and his stones, except that, owing to an error of judgment on my part, they were made a stumbling-block for the fainter spirits in Wiggpole Street. Henceforth I banish him and his dubious dealings from my mind—forever. So far as I am concerned, they are now non-existent."

"Thank you, Mr. Fenner. I'm sure if you could think him into another and less pleasant world, you would. Such evidence as that will look most picturesque in a police court. I needn't trouble you further."

Selby rose from his seat slowly.

"But surely Lord Elsmuir isn't talking of

prosecuting?" exclaimed Eustace, taken off his guard.

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied Selby. "But in any case it may suit me to show Mr. Cranley up."

"Leave the man alone," said Eustace suddenly, swiftly assuming the air of a friendly counselor. "He isn't worth powder and shot, on my honor he isn't!"

"You think not, Mr. Fenner?"

"I'm sure of it. Men of that sort are so often imperfectly sane, you know."

"But I've tumbled into a world peopled by men and women with straws in their hair. However, thanks for your advice, Mr. Fenner. Sorry you can't help me."

"But what do you intend to do?" asked Eustace.

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Selby contemptuously. "Morning."

He turned his back rudely on Eustace and left the room.

Eustace remained a moment staring at the closed door, listening to the departing step of his visitor, then he burst forth into abuse, which finally shaped itself thus:

“Beast! cat! dog! pig! hoary-headed Atheist hound!” Then he sat at the piano and struck a chord for each word of abuse, hurrying the movement on to the climax, till he lighted on a refrain bearing a lurid resemblance to the “March of the Men of Harlech.”

This effort relieved Eustace’s mind, although he was conscious of the moral weakness of the remedy. When he had finished at the piano he wrote the following note to Cranley:

“DEAR MR. CRANLEY,—It is ages since we met. I have something of importance to tell you. It is a matter in which your own interests are closely involved. Will you give me the pleasure of your company this even-

ing at dinner at the Tepidarium Club at eight o'clock? The urgency of the occasion excuses the shortness of the notice.

"Always, dear Mr. Cranley, yours,

"EUSTACE FENNER."

Having written this note, Eustace dispatched it by special messenger. An hour later he received the reply—

"Best thanks. Accept with pleasure."

"Now we can get to work," thought Eustace.

Meanwhile Lady Elsmuir had not been idle. She had taken Eustace's advice and consulted Cranley, who, when he heard of the proposed "Companions of St. Peter," was deeply impressed. There was, he thought, something inspired in the idea.

"And did it occur to you unsuggested, Lady Elsmuir?" He wondered, for it

seemed to him that some firmer hand than that of a casual amateur was revealed.

“Well,” replied her ladyship, “I may say it did, in a manner. Mr. Fenner did say that there existed some such sort of thing among the vanished tribe from which you got the stones.”

“Certainly there did,” exclaimed Cranley. “There is something more than mere coincidence in this. And it has occurred to you, Lady Elsmuir, to recreate this Brotherhood—the word applies, of course, to both sexes—under the name of ‘Companions of St. Peter’?”

“Exactly,” replied Lady Elsmuir, pleased with his quickness; “and Mr. Fenner thought that you wouldn’t mind drawing up a few rules for the guidance of the proposed company, and the use of the Sacred Stones.”

“I shall be proud to do so, Lady Elsmuir,” replied Mr. Cranley.

And in a few days he sent her a typewrit-

ten folio of instructions, the most important of which applied to the use of the Sacred Stones. Mr. Cranley did not think it wise to treat what he called "cases of structural damage." Faith in its highest form was, as they all knew, capable of moving mountains, but faith, however strong enough to mend a broken leg or repair a carious tooth, had become extraordinarily rare, especially in adults of the upper classes. In cases of fractures, therefore, he advised that the limb should be set in the usual way and the Healing Stone applied afterward, in which case it would be found that recovery would be greatly accelerated. In applying a divine remedy, he pointed out, it must be borne in mind that the results obtainable from the Healing Stone would be in exact proportion to the sum of faith expended by practitioner and patient combined, and that this amount must necessarily be unfixed in value and fluctuating in character. The social rules for elec-

tion, etc., Mr. Cranley wisely left to Lady Elsmuir, who before her marriage had been secretary of a Ladies' Golf Club.

On the day Mr. Cranley received Eustace's invitation to dine at the "Tepidarium" the Company had already passed its preliminary stage of existence. It consisted of eight members, included Mrs. Kinneston, and possessed two Sacred Stones, one the property of Lady Elsmuir, the other of Mrs. Gryffon, wife of the eminent inventor of "Gryffon's Unbreakable Corset Busks"—a lady whom the ebb and flow of fashionable religious excitements had carried triumphantly into Lady Elsmuir's smartly serious circle.

Such is the irony of circumstance that Eustace Fenner found himself entertaining at dinner a man whose very existence he had a few hours before declared his intention of overlooking.

There are moments when it is the wisest policy to feast even the enemy at our gate.

Eustace ordered a careful dinner for his guest. The flowers for the table he brought himself; to the *chef* he addressed a polite note concerning the manner in which he desired the mullets to be prepared, adding a playful word on the nature of *soufflés*. Nor did Eustace omit to take council with the butler on appropriate vintages. It was no commonplace Club-House Dinner, but a charming repast daintily supervised by an epicurean intelligence.

Eustace, who welcomed Cranley in the hall, was faintly disappointed to find his guest in morning dress.

He himself was immaculate, with faultless shirt-front, the whitest of waistcoats, the neatest of pumps.

“So sorry there was no time to get home to dress, Mr. Fenner,” said Cranley, “but I was at Lady Elsmuir’s. She kept me to the last minute. Her ladyship is absolutely absorbed in her splendid new undertaking.”

“That is as it should be,” replied Eustace, shaking him warmly by the hand. “I am delighted to see you in any dress.”

Then he conducted his guest to the table, and dinner was served. “Though he is little better than a savage,” thought Eustace, “I feel this dinner will not be wasted upon him.”

Nor was it. Before the first bottle of champagne Cranley’s suspicions, so far as revealed to the naked eye, had disappeared. And it was over the last glass that they got to close quarters with the subject.

“What I wanted to say is this,” remarked Eustace: “beware of a malignant wretch named John Selby. Selby is the father of Octavia Lee, a charming woman in whom Mrs. Galbraith is deeply interested. No doubt you have seen her at Wiggole Street. This Selby has the audacity to threaten—not actually in my presence, his effrontery will not carry him so far as that—‘to show you up.’ That is the phrase he uses, and in

short, as he says, 'to make a police-court job of it.'

"How does he propose to do that?" inquired the unshaken Cranley, thoughtfully sipping his wine.

"I am not sure. The fellow is an unbelieving dog and treats all claims to cure disease, except with drugs or the surgeon's knife, with infamous ribaldry. You may imagine what he says of your Sacred Stones."

"I can, sir," replied Cranley, "and I don't care a cuss. But I think I've heard of him. He once invented something useless enough for your War Office to secure at an absurd price. I infer from some loose remarks dropped this afternoon across Lady Elsmuir's tea-table that he entertains matrimonial ideas in the direction of your agreeable friend the widow."

"What! Mrs. Galbraith?" exclaimed Eustace. "The fatuous, wrinkled coxcomb!"

"That is so," answered Cranley. "And

how the ladies laughed! They led me to infer that Mrs. Galbraith—— But you mustn't tempt me to repeat the secrets of the boudoir."

Mr. Cranley winked knowingly across the table at Mr. Fenner.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Eustace. "But what did they say?"

"They led me to infer by inuendo and 'insinuendo,' and other female devices for imparting information, Mr. Fenner, that you were the man for Mrs. Galbraith's money."

"How very absurd," replied Eustace, "and improper!"

He felt he was beginning not to dislike Cranley. Obviously the hint came from Lady Elsmuir, and was to encourage him. With all her weaknesses he knew her ladyship for a keen observer.

Cranley did not miss the nature of the smile that passed over the face of his host. It gave him his cue.

“We have often wondered, Mr. Fenner,” resumed Cranley—“and by ‘we’ I mean on-lookers like myself, Lord and Lady Elsmuir, Mrs. Kinneston, and your old acquaintance, Mrs. Palgrave, who helps to run the Elsmuir show with such supreme tact and taste—how it was you and Mrs. Galbraith had never joined forces. Such an alliance strikes us all as an ideal one. You with your matchless spiritual enterprise, originality, and eloquence; she with her mighty gifts of faith, her mature comeliness, and generous worldly possessions. The reason usually advanced for the apparent holding back on your part is that your affections have a prior claim. Some of those who sit, or rather lately sat, under you at Wiggpole Street do not hesitate to point to the daughter of our arch-enemy Selby. This is, of course, mere surmise; but I think it well no longer to conceal from you what your friends are saying, both for your own sake and that of the two ladies whose

names the careless are now generally coupling with your own with that want of Christian reticence common just now, even in the highest circles, Mr. Fenner."

Mr. Cranley spoke in the same hard, relentless voice with which he lectured to audiences on Faith Healing. The effect was not displeasing on Eustace, who felt that his chivalrous sentiment toward the ladies in question, as well as the reflex feelings aroused in them, were undergoing impartial diagnosis.

"What you have said," replied Eustace, "has deeply affected me."

He drained his glass and signaled to the waiter to open the second bottle still nestling in the chaste coolness of the ice-pail.

The cork popped with the subdued cheerfulness well-trained corks acquire in smart clubs. The servant filled the glass goblets which our generous habits offer to the most expensive of wines. The diners sipped the

happy froth in friendly silence; the servant withdrew; conversation was resumed.

“It is my view,” continued Cranley, “that a man—especially a man whose many gifts point him out as the chosen of Providence—should not show too much diffidence in these matters. It has become in this country the custom to leave too much of the labor of courtship to the ladies. But can we, I would ask you, sir, expect ladies of the education, culture, and social position of Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Galbraith to show marked preference for any one man unless he has led them first to believe that their beauty, faith, piety, goodness, or what-not have touched his heart? Is it to be expected in the highest type of the modern woman, I ask you, sir? A housemaid may signal her preference by a homely and not immodest wink, but such means are not in the subtle and bewitching armory of high-souled matrons like Mrs. Galbraith, or beautiful young women like Mrs. Lee.”

"I feel there is much in what you say," said Eustace, draining his glass in unconscious mimicry of his guest.

"I hope I am not finding too much enjoyment in the pleasures of the table, Mr. Fenner," said Cranley, as the servant refilled their glasses, "but this is an excellent wine."

"It is indeed a good vintage," replied Eustace, "and I would the club had more of it."

He bowed genially toward his guest, and quaffed it with a royal manner. Cranley acknowledged the pledge, and continued with the air of a man, who, though dining, was bent on threshing out a problem.

"I don't know, sir, whether what is profanely called the spirit of comedy appeals to you. To me it is constantly present. Take the case of the Atheist Selby. He is plainly jealous of you. Hence his dislike. He imagines, not without reason, that if he could strike me you would, in his own ugly phrase, 'be shown up,' too."

Eustace winced; in this association the topic was less alluring.

“There is distinct light comedy there,” continued Cranley. “On the other hand, if you were to marry Mrs. Galbraith—pray overlook the personal abruptness of the argument—the light comedy would be all up against him. Similarly if Mrs. Lee were fortunate enough to secure you for her husband, the situation remains equally full of the same volatile spirit. Selby in neither case could be actively nasty, since, in the language of the market-place, he couldn’t upset my apple-cart without discomforting your daintier display of fruit. In the one case you would be able to square it, in the other he would be hitting his own daughter; and educated Atheists don’t do that! See? Seems to me I’m giving you quite a lecture on comedy as applied to the conduct of human affairs. Pray, sir, forgive me if I have erred, and attribute to this most refreshing vintage

the careless wanderings of an unbridled tongue."

Before answering Eustace reflected a moment. Evidently Cranley had heard something, probably through his confederate, Mrs. Palgrave, who was in the midst of all gossip spreading from the Wigpole Street center. Cranley, an acute observer, evidently considered that both the ladies would be found willing to encourage his suit if he had courage to woo. Moreover, it was clear that the onlookers regarded him as a sort of New Christian Joseph. This was galling as well as unjust. Cranley's reason for suggesting this matrimonial policy was clearly dictated by instinct of personal safety, since the adventurer believed that he would be safe to exploit his Sacred Stones for all they were worth under the protection of Eustace as the husband of a wealthy wife. Besides, if either marriage came off, Cranley might practise the system of ingenious blackmail

which he had already not unsuccessfully commenced.

In any case it would be safer to say little, especially on the top of so much champagne.

"Your friendly advice, Mr. Cranley," he replied at last, "is peculiarly grateful to one whom at the present moment a deep sense of loneliness oppresses. I shall never forget your thoughtful kindness. But for the moment it ill becomes me to trouble you with my affairs, and, by way of relaxation, after coffee I would propose that we go to the Empyrean, where Juanita, the famous Spanish *danseuse*, will dance the cachuca."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure, sir," replied Cranley, "especially since you have so generously permitted me to liberate my mind at your expense. We'll sink or swim together, sir."

The guest's ominous metaphor followed the host to the smoking-room and then to the Music Hall; yet when they separated at mid-

night on the steps of the Emyrean, Eustace felt that, in spite of the considerable expense, he had not spent an unprofitable evening.

“What you want, my dear friend,” said Cranley, as they parted, “is definite direction. I’ve given you that to-night.”

“Thank you,” replied Eustace. “So glad you enjoyed Juanita’s dancing. She is an admirable *artiste*.”

CHAPTER XVIII

ON the morning after the dinner to Cranley Eustace awoke with a headache, but a purpose which he remembered. He recalled his guest's words: "I have given you definite direction."

It was time he thought seriously of his own material welfare.

Nature did not intend even a leader in a religious movement to be a celibate. Hitherto Eustace had consoled himself by not a few agreeable and even warmly sentimental friendships. With such gifts as his he knew that he could not help being a favorite with women, whose soft and confiding natures, as he often said, reconciled him to the human race. He could look back to not a few pretty adventures outside the region bounded by the platonic affections,

There was, for instance, the pretty, fair-haired girl in the flower-shop, Gladys Rodd. Perhaps he had behaved a little indiscreetly. His pleasant but purely unpremeditated relations with her amounted to what old-fashioned and unimaginative people call a dangerous entanglement. The warm-hearted creature, exaggerating from lack of worldly training the importance of the politeness which men of his nature never refuse to pay where it is expected, actually appeared to think it possible that he might desire to marry her. Owing to his fatal good-nature, to his horror of hurting the feelings of a pretty, innocent girl, he had never yet undeceived her foolish trust. He now felt this was unfair to her. If he allowed her to cultivate further a confiding infatuation for himself, he feared the dear child—she was barely twenty—might never settle down comfortably with one of her own rank in life.

He was not to blame. Of that he was

sure. She was so impetuous. His conscience was clear.

Such little intimacies sprang up so naturally—just as the flowers do—that it is never easy to fix their beginnings. At most Eustace, on his side, admitted only a little careless drifting.

Mr. Dane, the florist, was Eustace's landlord and Miss Rodd's uncle; Eustace was passionately fond of flowers, Mr. Dane regarded them merely as articles of commerce. The deep scent of a rose, Eustace often said, carried him away on fragrant eddies, just as Wagner's music swept him into the shadow-land peopled only by disembodied senses. Eustace bought the flowers in their season, or rather Gladys put them down to his account. In his amiable way he said agreeable things to her when Dane was away, for, as he delicately suggested, it would not be wise on their part to allow Gladys' employer and relative to imagine that she was on

friendly terms with his tenant, especially as Dane's unpleasant manner—when the rent was in arrears—irritated the sensitive Eustace.

Oddly enough, their first sympathy arose out of a common dislike of Mr. Dane.

“How is the Brown Bear to-day?” Eustace would smilingly inquire.

“Dreadfully grumpy, as usual,” Gladys would reply.

One evening Eustace discovered Gladys listening to him in Wigpole Street. A few days after, when he was procuring a carnation for his coat—she always kept back the finest specimen for him, and charged the lowest price—Eustace inquired whether she would like to become a New Christian. Gladys thought she should, and so he lent her the little book which he had prepared for beginners, and surreptitiously superintended her religious education. As a pupil he found her willing, but “spiritually quite undeveloped.”

She was on the way to become a promising member of the Sect, when, unfortunately, Mr. Dane, a bitter Wesleyan, interfered.

“Drop it,” he said, “or I’ll tell your mother. Wigpole Street isn’t the place for a decent girl. Besides, I won’t have any one with me running after a new-fangled religion just as though she was a lady of title.”

This brutal speech Gladys reported to Eustace, and asked his advice.

“Every human soul,” he replied, “is entitled to follow its own spiritual bent. Come to Wigpole Street as often as you can, but don’t tell the horrid Brown Bear.”

And Gladys did as Eustace advised, and thought it “great fun” to deceive the “Brown Bear.”

Once, when Eustace was talking—rather playfully, perhaps—across the counter with Miss Rodd, Mr. Dane entered, and as Eustace was somewhat hurriedly leaving he heard him say to his niece, “Don’t encourage that

chap to come 'pawing' about you. I won't 'ave it."

Deeply annoyed, Eustace for several days kept studiously away from her, until, in fact, she wrote, "wondering what she had done to offend him."

On the following evening he found her in Wigpole Street, turning over the New Christian literature in the little library attached to the Church.

The girl seemed unhappy. Eustace was sympathetic and good-natured. He knew she lived at Camden Town with her mother. In a rash moment he invited her to meet him on Hampstead Heath on her next half-holiday. This was the commencement of not a few sentimental excursions among the pleasant London suburbs. Occasionally he took her to lunch at some one of the remoter hotels, where, as he said, neither of them was known, and where mischievous people could not say wicked things about them. But his

respect for her character never permitted him to accompany her to any resort where they were likely to meet those to whom either might be known even by sight.

But at last the little lady became exacting. She expected too much, and was bold enough to send him by the servant notes of a compromising character.

“This,” thought Eustace, “must be put a stop to. My motives might be misunderstood.”

It seemed hard that his amiable desire to bring a ray of light into the life of a girl should be obstructed by difficulties which a less trusting man would have realized at the outset. But now he clearly perceived the risks, and decided that, for Miss Rodd’s sake, their friendship—for he felt it was nothing more—must cease.

He was still suffering from the headache provoked by his hospitality to Cranley, when a note, accompanied by a clove-pink in a

paper cone, was handed him by the maid with a knowing grin and the information that they had been "sent up from Dane's."

Eustace put the pink in a wineglass of water—for he was wearing the flowered-silk morning-gown of his studious hours—and read the simple appeal, which said, "You never see me now. I send you a clove-pink with my love. Come to see your little Gladys. Brown Bear goes to Covent Garden at 11:30."

This was all; but, full of the higher resolutions which Cranley's suggestions had raised, Eustace found it too much.

The poor child must not be allowed to worry herself any more; his duty was to speak seriously to her. It would be unfair to encourage any foolish illusions on her part. His mind was made up.

At a quarter to twelve he walked down into the street, purposely omitting to place the

clove-pink in his buttonhole. Passing the window he saw within a young man purchasing a carnation. The transaction took some time, and seemed to weary Miss Rodd, whose thoughts were, at that moment, not in her business. When this customer left Eustace entered.

“So you’ve come at last!” exclaimed Miss Rodd reproachfully.

“Not so loud, please; you’ll be overheard,” replied Eustace warningly.

“I don’t care,” said the girl; “I’m sick of it all. You’ve made me dreadfully unhappy. Where’s the flower I sent you?”

“I’m keeping it for this evening. Don’t be silly. Be a good girl. I’ll meet you at the corner of Tottenham Court Road to-night when business is over, and walk back with you. I mustn’t stay here. People will talk. The Brown Bear is sure to hear. Good-bye till this evening.”

A lady entered the shop, and Eustace left,

feeling that the first step on the path of a painful duty had been taken.

The rest of the day he was uneasy. He now fully understood by the girl's manner that she had completely mistaken the nature of his kindly effort to cast on her monotonous life a few gleams of his own sunshine. The poor child's intelligence was so imperfectly developed! Yet he was very sorry for her, and looked forward to the walk to Camden Town with misgivings.

The walk promised to be fatiguing; moreover, he was going that night to Lady Elsmuir's reception, and knew that Octavia Lee would be there. He was, however, willing to forego the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Lee and to risk disappointing the several members of the smart religious set who were anxious to see him, for the sake of bringing this wayward child back to a reasonable state of mind.

It was dark and a showery evening when Eustace mingled among the shuffling crowd

waiting for omnibuses. The traffic was recklessly sliding in the wet streets; Eustace's frock-coat had suffered; his nice new hat was paying the penalty of the inclemency of the sky.

Soon across the road he recognized the neat jacket and hat of Gladys, who was peering under a dripping umbrella. Eustace left the shelter of his archway and joined her.

"It's a horrid evening," he said. "How unlucky! I'm afraid you will get wet."

"I don't care a bit about the wet," she replied—snappishly, it seemed to him.

He feared there would be trouble.

They walked together, under different umbrellas, down the long, shining street, full of ugly, roaring, mud-scattering busses.

"Very different to our Sunday afternoon at Shepperton!" said Gladys meaningly.

"Very different indeed!" he replied. "This is the real world we are in now."

"You're tired of me and don't want to be

bothered with me any more," said she. "Where's the flower I sent you?"

"It was too pretty for such a wet evening. The flower is happier on my mantelpiece."

"Ah! you won't wear it," she said indignantly. "I'm not a fool—no, not quite."

"No, you're no fool. That is why I am going to talk to you as a good and reasonable girl."

"It's too late to talk about being reasonable, Eustie," she answered nervously.

"Eustie" jarred on Eustace. He felt that she ought not to make endearing experiments with his name.

"My dear child," he said, "I must beg of you not to call me 'Eustie'—as a matter of fact, I must beg of you not to call me anything, since the claims of duty will not permit us to meet any more."

"Not meet again!" cried the girl aghast. "And after all you said and promised! You can't mean it."

“It is for the best,” answered Eustace; “in fact, it is absolutely essential for your present and future happiness. I’m only thinking of what is best for you—not of myself.”

“What did you want to make me a New Christian for,” asked the girl, “if it was only to drop me?”

“‘Drop you,’ dear child,” cried Eustace; “you are ungrateful. Spiritually, I shall never drop you, but always regard you as one of the souls I have helped to enlighten. Separation—at least in this tiresome world—is now necessary between us. Friendships such as ours cannot possibly be permanent. Let us face facts. Inexorable circumstances insist that we must go our different ways. The obligations of my difficult office do not permit me to think only of myself. There are others—the little New Christian community—that look to me. You belong to the world, I do not. My dear child, what did you ex-

pect? You knew it must come. You are not quite a baby."

But Gladys was beginning to cry like an angry one. The tears ran down her face mingled with rain-drops.

"I thought you meant to—to—" she sobbed. "You remember what you said that day—under the trees—at Shepperton."

"What! Marry you!" exclaimed Eustace; "what an idea! My child, do you not understand that I am bound for the present by a vow of celibacy?"

"That means you mustn't marry?" she sobbed. "Like a priest?"

"Yes," he replied, slightly annoyed; "I thought you knew—don't cry, it's silly. I can't think of marrying. The notion is preposterous."

"Then I think you behaved meanly," exclaimed the girl; "not like a gentleman, but like a beastly hypocrite. I see now you're not a gentleman—not the least bit like one."

You tell lies and you use long words no one can understand, and talk about religion—a nice religion yours is, making fools of girls like me. A nice lesson you've taught me, Mr. Eustace Fenner, and one I'll remember. Talk of the Brown Bear, he's worth fifty of you. There! I never want to see you again—you beast!"

Anger had dried her tears, and before he could answer the girl ran into the wet road and sprang into a flaring yellow omnibus at that moment setting down a passenger.

Eustace, a little sadly, watched the lurid vehicle roll away. It seemed his destiny to be misunderstood. Yet he was not sorry the interview was over, although he could not help feeling that the poor child had treated him ungratefully. He had tried to improve her manners, but the unfortunate outburst merely proved how superficial had been his success. The one idea of girls of her class, he feared, was marriage—an aim which pain-

fully limited their intelligence in dealings with the other sex, and entirely destroyed any reasonable outlook on life.

After such a scene it would, of course, be unpleasant to meet her on the doorstep or pass her in the street; she was hot-tempered and almost sure to behave unbecomingly. However, the worst of the little difficulty was over. Henceforward it could not be more than a slight moral inconvenience. One small advantage which her fit of unreasonable anger had brought with it was this: he would be back in his room an hour before he expected and have ample time to dress for Lady Elsmuir's reception.

He hailed a passing hansom and drove swiftly home through the rain-swept streets.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Eustace arrived at Lady Elsmuir's the rooms were full. The pretty clove-pink which the foolish girl had sent him shone cheerfully in his silk-faced coat. At one moment he had thought of throwing it away; but the flower was so fresh and fragrant that, instead of sacrificing it to a sentiment, he decided to wear it for its own sake.

A Hungarian band was throbbing and thrilling in the great drawing-room, full of tall, elegant, bare-shouldered women in diamonds and lace. Mrs. Kinneston was there with her splendid new bronze hair, chattering to two frivolous-looking young men with sleek heads, and eyes which grew insolent when they fell on Eustace. She smiled at him mischievously and murmured, "Welcome to the house of miracles, Mr. Fenner!"

Lady Elsmuir, to whom he made his way, was quite cordial when he inquired how the new Order was progressing.

"We are going strong," her ladyship replied; for with a foot in two sets with contradictory ideals she flourished her figures of speech with a carelessness shocking to the serious-minded Eustace—"we've acquired two Sacred Stones and open a 'Cure Book' next week. Mr. Cranley will tell you all about that; I'm too busy. You'll find Mrs. Lee in the other room. I fancy she is expecting to see you. The Spencer-Hopkinsons brought her. Mrs. Galbraith wouldn't come. She's a bit on her hind-legs, I fancy, because I've cut Wiggpole Street."

For once Eustace was glad that he was not to meet Mrs. Galbraith, whose presence would have interfered with a daring project. As he slipped through the crowd the significance of Lady Elsmuir's hint grew upon him. Cranley must have given her ladyship his

version of their recent talk concerning Octavia Lee. The man was in his mind when he saw him and noted his assumption of that faint touch of elegant weariness suitable to a fashionable religious experimentalist in an aristocratic environment.

“Charming evening,” said Cranley; “every one here one knows. You will find Mrs. Lee in the next room. She was speaking of you just now—so amiably!”

“Is her horrid father here?” asked Eustace anxiously.

“No. It was Lady Elsmuir who presented me to Mrs. Lee, and as a friend of yours. She was most gracious to me in consequence, most gracious.”

Cranley joined a group of ladies, one of whom beckoned him with her fan.

Eustace was displeased that Cranley should claim him as a friend; however, he would undeceive Mrs. Lee.

The absence of the odious Selby was a relief.

Eustace found Octavia, in white and pearls, near an open window, talking to a stout, profusely-decorated elderly lady. When she saw him she smiled, and he hastened toward her.

Octavia was, in fact, a little bored. Her neighbor had asked her twice whether she really thought there was anything in Lady Elsmuir's new Order for Faith Healing, or whether it was simply another fad; and twice had Octavia replied that she was sure she didn't know. Her friendship with Mrs. Galbraith caused her to be mistaken for an expert in all sorts of necromancy, thought-reading, and psychic research—a reputation she accepted with amused resignation.

Octavia shook hands with Eustace; the stout lady in diamonds hurried off to the doorway where Mr. Cranley was telling in his silkiest manner, and for the fiftieth time, the story of the Sacred Healing Stones.

"They are all mad about the stones to-night, Mr. Fenner," she said.

"I am dreadfully tired of hearing of them," replied he. "But isn't Mrs. Galbraith here?"

"No; she couldn't stand the stones."

"No wonder!"

"But you don't think it all rubbish, do you?"

"I never denounce before I am certain," said Eustace. "I am biding my time."

He felt that he had sufficiently hinted his distrust.

Octavia's sympathy touched Eustace's in music—the New Christian teacher's one serious accomplishment. In the next room the Hungarians were chasing wild fancies through an arabesque of strange dance movements.

He caught her interest, and in order to escape the heat of the room they sought a balcony overlooking the street where the

lamps of a long line of waiting carriages shone through the warm damp.

The murmur of the distant traffic reached Eustace as he stood beside her; he felt the encouragement of its faint rumor of purposeful life. Its message was, "No time must be wasted." Why not find out whether some breach in her affections might not be open to the man brave enough to rush to the assault? With such a woman one could never be sure.

While they talked music his inner self was weighing risks and conjecturing prospects.

It was true she had given him no visible encouragement, but then he had as yet shown her no sign that he desired her to be his wife. How could she suspect the deep affection burning within him? The first step must be to let her know its existence. This was difficult to reveal inoffensively, as a chivalrous gentleman.

They were alone on the balcony under the

awning: she seated in a low chair at the corner, he leaning against the railings looking down at her. Had not his chance come?

Her face was beautiful and calm, her eyes soft and lustrous in the half light.

"But I shall tire you with all my music talk," he said. "Listen! the Hungarians are off again—Liszt this time. So few English people really care about music, my one comfort in a world into which I seem to have been born"—he was on the point of saying "to be misunderstood," when he remembered a sentimental girl's book identified by the word, so he said, "to be trampled on by the pushing practical people."

"I have never seen them trampling on you, Mr. Fenner," she said, smiling a little at the idea of the smooth-faced, long-haired young man, with the nice rounded figure suggestive of well-assimilated food, wallowing under the feet of those whom she suspected that he secretly mocked.

“The most painful operations are generally performed under the surface,” he replied.

She smiled, and their eyes met.

“Do you really think you *are* misunderstood, Mr. Fenner?” she asked.

“No more than other sensitive people, Mrs. Lee; no more than Mrs. Galbraith is, and probably less than you are.”

Octavia had no wish to discuss her own feelings on a balcony with an eccentric-looking young man to the accompaniment of a string band. Her eyes fell on his pink—one of a rare and beautiful sort.

“What a lovely flower!” she said, to change the conversation. “It reminds me of a bed in our Indian garden in the hills. I never saw so fine a specimen in England.”

Her interest was genuine. He took it from his coat.

“Do accept it, Mrs. Lee, it will go so beautifully with your dress.”

"But I wouldn't rob you for the world," she answered.

"It wouldn't be robbery, but generosity. It would be treating me like a friend, not thrusting me far away from your sympathies because we don't think quite the same. Do take it, please, and wear it."

To refuse would have been to exaggerate the importance of a trifling courtesy; she took it graciously enough, and fixed it in the bosom of her dress.

"There," he said, "that is good of you. It has such a wonderful scent, too."

"My Indian garden over again," she replied, with an imperceptible sigh.

"Ah, an Indian garden!" he repeated—"an Indian garden.

· The champak odors fall
Like sweet thoughts in a dream'—

one of the sweetest images, I always think, in all our lyric verse."

She was looking at him now, but he could

read no meaning in her expression, except that it was quietly beautiful.

Was there nothing—no peg in her conversation to which he could hitch naturally what he wanted to say?

Suddenly he remembered Cranley's talk of the spirit of comedy, usually unseen in human affairs, and made one of those gallant dashes to which emergency sometimes spurred him.

"You will think me quite mad, Mrs. Lee, for what I'm about to say; perhaps you will never forgive me for it, or even speak to me again. But at all risks, and in defiance of all conventionalities, I must speak."

His voice shook with emotion; his face grew pale with excitement.

Octavia at first was on the point of returning to the room, but curiosity to hear him—the curiosity responsible for so much mischief—held her in her seat, and before she could reply he recommenced, speaking rap-

idly, and with a feeling rarely exhibited in life and seldom found on the stage where it is chiefly needed.

“There is no law against love—I have never loved before. I never knew what the word meant—out of the poets. My energies, my ambitions hitherto have found other outlets in a deep, unutterable craving for spiritual things.”

“You have said enough,” she interrupted; “you have no right——”

“No; I have no right, but hear me to the end, I entreat you. I would not say a word to offend or grieve you were it not for the overmastering, ineffable affection fallen on me—for you—the ideal of my youth, the perfection of my maturer musings. It is terrible, because I can see by your face that there is so little hope. But if you cannot love me in return, you can pity me and forgive.”

She rose to her feet now and faced him.

“You have said more than enough,” she

replied. "The thing's impossible, absurd! I scarcely know you!"

"Could you never under any circumstances sacrifice yourself and become the wife of a man who loves you? Could not you help him, and be his companion through life, leading him to the highest goal to which humanity can attain—forgetfulness of self in the struggle to comfort suffering humanity?"

"Never! never! never!" cried Octavia, restraining a half-hysterical desire to laugh, for it seemed that her life had jumped from the commonplace rails on which it ran into a region sickly with violent scents and absurd with exotic passions. "I have never given you the slightest excuse for saying what you have said."

"There is no hope, then. O God!" he exclaimed, and his voice broke with a dry sob. "Leave me, leave me, I beg!"

Octavia stepped into the smaller drawing-room, whence the guests were rapidly stream-

ing in the direction of the supper-rooms just opened. She had never seen a man weep before, and now found it an unpleasant sight.

What should she do? Go down to supper, or——? While she was hesitating in the now empty room, Eustace, with pale, contracted face and red eyes, stepped in from the balcony.

His manner, she was relieved to see, was calm and respectful.

“I don’t know what you will think of me, Mrs. Lee. I—I—forgot myself; what I felt overmastered me.”

“Well, Mr. Fenner,” said Octavia in her most practical voice, “since you forgot yourself, as you admit, I will forget what you said. That’s a compact. It was an awful blunder!”

“You mean the painful scene shall be as though it never occurred?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“That you will never mention it to a soul?”

“Yes—yes. Of course.”

“On your honor, Mrs. Lee? Not even to Mrs. Galbraith?”

“Yes, on my honor. Do you imagine I wish to boast of the very foolish part you made me play?”

“Forgive me for making you promise; I am dazed and dispirited.”

“Perhaps you will be good enough to take me to the supper-room, Mr. Fenner?”

He offered his arm, and they descended the stairs. Near the door of the dining-room the Spencer-Hopkinson's party were supping. He conducted her in silence to their table, and said, “Good night, Mrs. Lee.”

“But won't you take some supper?” she said kindly, for she was hungry herself.

“No, thank you,” he said, and disappeared into the hall.

He was behaving, she thought, exactly as a rejected lover should—he was silently respectful, with no appetite!

But though the adventure had increased

Eustace's craving for refreshment, for he had dined early, many hours before, perhaps in anticipation of a pleasant supper, yet he felt it impossible to eat in sight of the beautiful woman who had just contemptuously rejected him. What was he to do? Suddenly he remembered that lighter refreshment had been served in a little room off the drawing-room. Thither he hastily went, and found half a bottle of freshly opened champagne, some biscuits, cakes, sweetmeats, and a liberal supply of strawberries and cream, of which he was exceedingly fond. He ate a plateful with cream, a couple of small, rich cakes, and finished the champagne, all at high speed, and felt refreshed.

This hurried repast over, Eustace sought his coat and hat. Passing the dining-room, through the half-opened door he saw Mrs. Lee supping composedly with her friends, the flower he had given her still shining in her white dress.

“She is an honorable woman,” he reflected, “and will never tell Mrs. Galbraith.”

The philosophy of real life had taught him that when a man with ambitions desires to be married he must be prepared for disappointment.

He had never expected that Mrs. Lee would accept him, and unless he had been absolutely persuaded that she would never tell he would not have risked the proposal. As it was, he admired himself for his enterprise and courage. Yet walking home over the muddy pavements, heedless of his smart pumps, he feared that contact with the world was weakening his hold on those spiritual things which should be above them all.

CHAPTER XX

FOR more than a week Eustace saw nothing of Mrs. Galbraith. There were several points on his horizon which he was watching with some anxiety. In the first place there was Gladys Rodd. Where there is a jealous girl he knew there was always danger. He really was quite disappointed in her character, and feared she was after all "only a vindictive little cat."

One morning he met her in the street outside the florist's shop on her way home, and took off his hat with as much respect as he would have shown to the most influential member of the Wiggpole Street community. Yet she rejected his courtesy with contempt, and addressed him rudely and menacingly!

"I told my mother about you," she said; "so don't you go fancying you've heard the

last of me, because you haven't! I'll let you know a girl's not to be treated like dirt for nothing!"

"My dear Miss Rodd," Eustace expostulated, "really I don't understand you."

"Wait, and you will," she snapped out at him, and passed on.

Now what did this presage? The impression left on his mind by a half-forgotten glimpse through a window helped him to realize the nature of the risk he ran.

One evening, in the company of Miss Rodd, whom he had accompanied even to her mother's threshold, Eustace had seen Mrs. Rodd reading *Lloyd's Weekly* under the light of a flaring gas jet.

Eustace's impressions were swift. The little vision of the Camden Town parlor and the stout lady in black silk absorbing her weekly allowance of gossip and news, conveyed to his mind a certain sense of uneasiness, of which he did not grasp the signifi-

cance until Gladys' threat represented her mother under the formidable aspect of "the mother who has been told things."

This is the shape which his uneasiness now took:—

"Suppose that fat woman encourage her daughter to bring an action against me for breach of promise, what shall I do? There is no case, but an angry woman may find compensation in 'showing the man up'—the excuse of vulgar people for vindictiveness of this kind."

Fortunately there was no visible change in Mr. Dane, Mrs. Rodd's half-brother and Eustace's landlord. So long as the florist's manner remained unaggressive, Eustace considered that he need seek no protective policy. Still he kept a polite, if somewhat apprehensive, eye on his landlord, and as a propitiatory offering paid half the March quarter before the midsummer rent was due.

But Miss Rodd was not the only cause for

uneasiness. The other trouble came from John Selby, who, Cranley coolly announced, as though it were nothing unusual in the routine of human affairs, had engaged a firm of private detectives to inquire into the affairs, past and present, of that daring adventurer.

"Luckily Lady Elsmuir is running the show now," Cranley remarked, "so my position is a fairly strong one. They can't get at her!"

"An honest man's position is always strong," said Eustace. "What can they bring against you? Naturally there must be a diversity of opinion concerning the remedial value of the Sacred Stones, but there's nothing improper in that."

"Of course there's nothing against me or them," answered the imperturbable Cranley, "only detectives invent clever lies. They may pretend they are not the genuine article. Luckily our 'Cure Book' will disprove that."

"Your 'Cure Book'!" groaned Eustace.

"Certainly, if there were trouble I should call that in evidence," answered Cranley; "as I have said before, we sink or swim together."

"Yes, but please don't say it again," exclaimed Eustace.

"You'll want a nerve tonic if you are not careful," said Cranley, with raised eyebrows.

"My dear fellow!" returned Eustace, "you must excuse my irritability. I'm being awfully worried."

This was Eustace's second worry.

The third was of a different nature, and must be faced at once.

He received the following letter from Mrs. Galbraith:—

"MY DEAR EUSTACE,—Come to tea this afternoon, please. I wish to consult you about Octavia Lee, who is in the country, but who returns in a few days. Major King was

here yesterday and said some odd things. Your name was mentioned.

“Yours sincerely,

“EDITH GALBRAITH.”

Here the panic-point was reached by Eustace. The tone of the letter struck him as far colder than usual. Suppose Octavia Lee had told Major King of Eustace's proposal. In that case would it not reach the ears of Mrs. Galbraith? Eustace did not believe Mrs. Lee capable of such meanness, especially after her promise, but Miss Rodd's conduct had convinced him that morally a woman is greatly man's inferior. He started, therefore, to see his friend with some misgivings.

The cunning demon of ill-luck seemed plotting against him, enticing him with dangerous traps, compelling him, in order to escape, to adopt courses in which the highest interests of his spiritual welfare must be sacrificed.

Still he knew life was a compromise at the expense of the nobler virtues.

When, however, he discovered from the servant that Mrs. Galbraith was to see him in the drawing-room, his courage returned. He knew from their last serious interview that she kept her most unpleasant room for her least pleasant business.

Mrs. Galbraith was sitting near a beautiful bowl of roses in the quiet light streaming through the sunblinds. The heat without was great. The torrid murmurs of the streets reached the cool, quiet, fragrant room in muffled, somnolent murmurs. It seemed the abode of unruffled peace. There were no ghosts there!—no debts, no terrors, no backslidings!

Instead of dodging difficulties, poor Eustace yearned to stretch himself on one of those quiet couches and sleep away his anxieties.

“You look tired,” said Mrs. Galbraith kindly.

Her greeting relieved him. Evidently she was not angry.

“I am, dreadfully,” he replied; then, with admirable feeling, quoted—

“I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away this life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear.”

His pathetic sigh rustled the roses as he stooped to enjoy their scent.

“Why, what is wrong?” she inquired.

“Oh, nothing,” replied Eustace, “except that I have commenced my great work on ‘Mind and Faith,’ and for such an undertaking fear the want of encouragement in this melancholy world. But we will talk of that—a dishonorable grievance at best—another time. You wish to consult me about matters of far greater moment—Mrs. Lee’s affairs.”

His sudden air of personal detachment said plainly: “The whole force of my intellect and sympathy are at your command; draw on them as you will!”

"I am worried about Octavia," replied Mrs. Galbraith.

"Because you cannot help her find her own soul? Leave her to chance and the Power which rules it. Have patience. You have done all you can. If she claim the world let her keep the world."

But at that moment his friend's wings were not prepared for a lofty flight. The practical aspects were uppermost.

"I have been thinking," said Mrs. Galbraith, "that the best thing Octavia can do is to marry."

"I think so too," replied Eustace, with a faint shudder of jealousy, "if she wish it. But I have an idea that she is not easy to please. Who is there for her to marry?"

"There is Major King," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"Humph!" interjected Eustace disparagingly.

"He is a soldier and a gentleman, and he adores her," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"Of course, of course," said Eustace hastily, "he is all that—most simple and manly, and not bad looking, as the world estimates looks. But has he enough soul for her?"

"He doesn't carry it on his sleeve," returned the other. "He was here yesterday, and spoke to me in the manliest and frankest way. He loved her, he said. He had been her husband's oldest friend; did I think he had any chance. It was an idiotic thing to worry a woman on a mere chance. If I could assure him he had none, he would go back to India to his soldiering without letting her know."

"Why did you not suggest that he should refer to Mr. Selby?" suggested Eustace maliciously.

"It appears Mr. Selby had told him Octavia had made up her mind never to marry again—but Major King couldn't believe it."

“Just like the selfish, cold-blooded atheist to suggest such a thing!” said Eustace. “He finds his daughter useful as a widow.”

“I think him less selfish than you do,” said Mrs. Galbraith.

“I only hope he is,” replied Eustace; “I admit I’m not sanguine. But how did you advise the Major? I should have told him to go off to India. Soldiers oughtn’t to marry if they take their profession seriously.”

“But I thought he had a chance,” replied Mrs. Galbraith, “and said so, only I warned him not to speak too soon. ‘Not rush it?’ he said, and I replied, ‘Exactly.’”

“That was sound advice enough,” said Eustace. “But you said my name was mentioned.”

“It was too foolish. Major King asked me if I thought you cared for Octavia.”

“How absurd! Except as a suffering, unanchored, fluttering soul, I have no interest in her—beyond that she is your friend.”

"I told him so."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing of importance."

"My dear friend, you are sparing my feelings. I can bear it. I can guess what a worldly-minded soldier would say under the spur of unreflecting jealousy."

"Well, he said it was a lucky thing, since Octavia and you had nothing in common."

Eustace felt that the Major had said something more vigorous and less flattering, but forebore to seek further. He was amazed, however, and his secret anger drove him to make another gallant dash toward the mountain-tops, where, still beyond his reach, he seemed to see security and prosperity shining.

"It is true," replied Eustace. "Mrs. Lee and I have little in common but our taste for music. Her unbelief chills and freezes me. Perhaps I lack your beautiful insight and sympathy."

"I love Octavia!" said Mrs. Galbraith, suddenly becoming aware of a strange agitation in his manner. Eustace was twisting his white hands nervously; a lock of his hair fell across his forehead; his breath came quick and short.

"Why, Eustace," she asked, "what is the matter? You are quite pale."

It was the pallor of pent-up excitement before great risks.

"I can't help it!" he exclaimed abruptly. "I'm so terribly human, after all."

"Terribly human!"

"Yes, terribly human, Edith Galbraith. For months I fought against it, but it has mastered me at last."

She looked at him with a bewildered and grieved face.

He rose to his feet and stood over her, nervous and agitated.

"I used to think once, and even after I first knew you, that love was not for me. My

happiness seemed outside human passion, disembodied, as it were, in a world where only mind exists, and whither so few of us, held down by this fleshly screen, can penetrate. In my happiest moments, indeed, I have been conscious only of the world outside the flesh. But man is man; human love is human love; at its best it enshrines what is least worldly and most spiritual in our poor, straining hearts. Edith Galbraith, don't shrink from me, for I love you—love you with all my soul."

The sudden fall from stern peaks above, of rocks across pleasant mountain paths, on some clear, breathless, summer morning, calls forth in the peaceful wanderer the same terror and confusion which Eustace's unexpected and passionate appeal created in the kind heart of Mrs. Galbraith.

He looked so pale and shaken that she pitied him through the dust of the trouble his words had raised.

“Oh, I love you with all my soul! with all my soul!” he repeated. “The poor barriers of self-control have broken and fallen, in reckless fragments, about my enfeebled will. I love you. There is no more to be said.”

A silence followed, in which she slowly recovered presence of mind. Madness seemed in the air.

“Oh, Eustace!” she exclaimed, “I’m so dreadfully sorry. I always hoped some day that you would marry some young and good woman, but——”

“You are the only woman in the world for me,” he interrupted.

“But I am almost an old one.”

“Old! you, with your supreme beauty, with the charm of your unspeakable spiritual grace! In other women the soul is invisible, in you it shines out like the moonlight through a silver autumn mist.”

Although he perceived that he had fright-

ened her, he began to hope that he was winning.

The mountain-tops of prosperity seemed nearer.

But gradually her look grew firmer, and her voice too.

“What you have told me,” she said, “makes me very unhappy, and alters my whole view of life. When my husband died I made up my mind that nothing would induce me to marry again. The bare idea revolts me. I found my peace in the New Christian Faith and that trust in divine goodness out of which it grew. I hoped that we might work together, and that I might help you forward on the new career.”

“She could do that so nicely,” thought Eustace, now a little dismayed by the significance of her words, “if she would marry me next week.”

“But I am waiting to hear my fate,” was what he said. “Why cannot we go forward,

side by side, toward the end? Your splendid faith would give me strength, my brain would stimulate your endeavor. As man and wife our influence would be increased tenfold. Alone, I sway in the stream of circumstance, an ineffectual reed of high purpose, but with will weakened and weighed down by hopeless love."

"I feel I cannot possibly think of marrying you!" she exclaimed; "it's—it's unthinkable!"

"Because you cannot love me?"

"Not in the way you ask."

"Then my career is over, my hopes ended, my life—save as long, weary, outstretched dream—dead? Love has dragged me to the world, and I feel I shall never launch my spirit's boat again. Without your love power of belief will wither in me. Hitherto my faith has fed on yours; now it must starve in doubt and solitude."

He made a little movement as if he would

leave her, but, as she did not reply, turned toward her again.

“Is it good-bye, then, forever?” he asked.
“Must I go and drown myself in the world?”

He saw that she was deep in thought.

“Well?” he said. “Answer me!”

“Please go now,” she replied. “I want to be alone. I will write to you this evening—and decide.”

He hesitated a moment, but the look in her face made him obey.

“Good-bye,” he said, feeling it was no time for further pleadings, and afraid, though he longed, to kiss her smooth cheek.

Slowly descending the stairs, he heard her ring the bell, then fancied he heard muffled sobs.

Tears in such cases, he thought, were of good augury.

The servant opened the door, and Eustace, with uncheerful feet, stepped into the sultry street. In spite of his gallant rush he felt

himself still far from the refuge he so desperately sought.

The same evening brought him the following letter:—

“The more I think of it the worse seems the entanglement you have made. Yet I believe in your sincerity, and pity you with all my heart. I also believe in the wisdom of my own purpose never to marry again. Still, I cannot bear to make you unhappy. I cannot answer you now. Give me six weeks to decide. Meanwhile please do not come to me. I shall be absent from Wigpole Street. When the time for reflection is over you will hear from me.

“EDITH GALBRAITH.”

Eustace read the letter anxiously twice.

“I had no idea she was so dreadfully cold,” he thought, with a chilly sense of disappointment. The suggestion that she might be willing to sacrifice her happiness to promote his, however unflattering, was not discourag-

ing. The decision to keep him in suspense for six weeks struck him as peculiarly selfish on the part of a woman of such altruistic ambition. He forgot that she could not realize that in six weeks anything might happen to a man whose careless good-nature had given so many hostages to the mischievous wheel of ill-luck.

Still, he reflected, when a woman asks for six weeks to decide whether she will accept or reject an offer of marriage, the chances are very much in favor of the man, unless meanwhile—and here Eustace grew anxious—an enemy blacken his character and ruin his prospects.

“In this horrid, malicious world of ours,” he sighed, “one never knows what may happen.”

CHAPTER XXI

MARRIAGE—OR rather the idea of marriage—reveals itself in strange places.

Selby was a shrewd observer, but even shrewdness does not blunt the edge of vanity. When the thought of re-marriage entered his head it did not occur to him that he might appear to Mrs. Galbraith quite impossible as a suitor. To himself he appealed as an elegant man of the world, with a clear understanding and a caustic but not unamiable wit.

The woman, he reasoned, wanted a sensible man to look after her; otherwise she would fall a prey to some quack religious adventurer. He was obviously the right man to prevent such a catastrophe. But he was never in a hurry, and when he was assured by his daughter that Mrs. Galbraith was no

more likely to marry Eustace Fenner than she was herself, he set to work quietly to see, as he said, whether "it wasn't possible to show up the clique of quacks who were having such a splendid run for other people's money."

The cunning agents he employed meanwhile were collecting a good deal of interesting information. He had heard of Eustace's little indiscretion with Miss Rodd, and of his money troubles, but did not know that a cheque for £500 had been paid to Eustace by Mr. Cranley. Thus, although John Selby had acquired a superficial acquaintance with Eustace's weaknesses, he was still quite unable to prove to Mrs. Galbraith—as he ardently desired to do—that her favorite was an impostor. To accuse him too soon would be to make a martyr of a rogue. To the ordinary observer, Eustace's sincerity was as convincing as Mrs. Galbraith's.

Cranley, John Selby suspected of being a daring scamp, and he was now, at considera-

ble expense, collecting information concerning the earlier career of the discoverer of the Sacred Stones. But although he began to fear that he might not, after all, be able "to make a police-court job of it," he hoped to pick up enough evidence to persuade Lady Elsmuir and "the Companions of St. Peter" that they were the dupes of an impostor with a keen eye for the business values of spiritual follies.

When Octavia and his granddaughter went down to the Red House for a few days, Selby followed them for a night, to be quite sure what his daughter thought of Mrs. Galbraith's views on the subject of second marriages.

They walked round the garden, and he questioned her with a bluntness which he considered the best form of tact.

"I've an idea, Tavia, that your friend Mrs. Galbraith has taken it into her head that she must marry you again," said Selby.

"Nonsense!" replied Octavia.

“Having failed to convert you, she thinks she ought to help find you a husband. I have heard her almost admit as much. I know what your views on second marriages are”—Octavia, however, had expressed none—“so I just give you a warning, so that you may be on your guard.”

Octavia was now very different to the woman, who, a few weeks before, had knelt and wept before the cross. Youth and hope had claimed her once more; the fulness of life flowed in her blood; her dreamings no longer drifted to melancholy anchorage over an Indian grave.

Although her dead husband was still loved in memory, she was once more conscious that the future belonged to her. The practical philosophy of life sets definite limits to the sorrows of youth quite as effectually as it blunts the griefs of age.

“Thank you,” replied Octavia to her father’s unseemly warning.

“Oh, of course you’re a sensible woman, with no wish to give my granddaughter a stepfather,” said Selby; “but do you happen to know Mrs. Galbraith’s own views on the subject of second marriages? I’m aware, as you’ve already hinted, that she wouldn’t look at a fellow like Fenner; but suppose a really eligible suitor turned up, a man of position and reputation, do you imagine she would—eh—well, marry him, if he put the case before her?”

“I doubt it,” said Octavia.

“Why? Because she’s so engrossed in that New Christian stuff—a whim of the moment? You do injustice to her common sense!”

“I’ve never seen the man whom Mrs. Galbraith would think of marrying,” said Octavia; “I don’t believe he exists. I know her pretty well.”

“Rubbish!” replied her father testily, but without further pursuing the subject.

“She’s afraid,” he reflected, “I’m going to

give her a stepmother. What's the use of consulting her?"

Soon after this Mr. Selby returned to town to prosecute some social and religious researches which interested him quite as much as the chemical studies which, twenty-five years earlier, had resulted in the Selby Time Fuse.

It was on a beautiful morning in the last week of June, on the day following her father's departure, that Octavia once more wandered up to the church on the hill. Mrs. Galbraith's cross was shining in the warm sunshine with the same luster, but its mystery had vanished, because her sense of loneliness had been effaced by the fresh and ever-renewing interests of life. Octavia realized that the pain of sorrow for the dead must inevitably be numbed by sympathy with the living; the romance of regret lives, but the ache is blunted by the relentless hours when youth is warm and the spirit high. Juggle with the

fact as she might, she felt life must be for the living, and that the claims of the lost, whatever space they filled in remembrance, cannot divert the drift of human feeling from the natural course.

When she returned home she found a letter from Mrs. Galbraith, begging her to return to town. "I miss you dreadfully; do come," she wrote, "and at once."

Eustace Fenner's proposal had set the pendulum of Edith Galbraith's doubts painfully a-swing. Her misgivings grew greater after the letter was written. Eustace appeared in a new light—a light for the first time flecked with unpleasant shades of suspicion, and she wanted the support of Octavia's practical mind.

Octavia read the letter twice for an inner meaning.

"There seems," she thought, "a conspiracy to make a fool of that splendid woman."

On the following morning, when Octavia

Lee returned to London with her little girl and the maid, all her protective instincts were bristling, and she resolved that fortune-hunters and adventurers should be "warned off."

It would be an appalling absurdity, she thought, if her father invited Mrs. Galbraith to marry him, and her last interview with him had persuaded her that he was capable of it.

When Mrs. Galbraith met her in the hall at Hyde Park Gardens, Octavia saw the change in her friend. The serenity of her face was troubled, and the comfort-giving assurance in her kind eyes shifting.

"Something has worried her," thought Octavia. "Probably only some muddle at Wiggole Street."

In spite of his eloquence, she felt that Mr. Fenner was a muddler.

His melodramatic proposal on the balcony at Lady Elsmuir's reception seemed a key by

which the singular religious enterprise in Wiggpole Street could, Octavia thought, be read in the character of its leading apostle. Its success, she felt, was due to the glamour bestowed on it by such women as Mrs. Galbraith. At one time she had almost yearned to accept whatever Mrs. Galbraith believed, but now she had seen too much. Excess of faith may mean, she argued, the suicide of reason.

"She shall not be sacrificed, though," Octavia determined, as Mrs. Galbraith poured out the tea.

"Don't you think me a wretch for hurrying you back?" Mrs. Galbraith asked.

"No, I felt glad that you should want me," Octavia replied, "but I wondered why."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, do."

"Major King has consulted me about going to India."

"Why, he is only just home."

"But he intends returning unless he has a strong inducement to stay."

"I don't understand," said Octavia, who nevertheless could have made a shrewd guess.

"You won't think I'm an interfering busybody if I tell you bluntly?"

"Oh, my dear, interfere with me as much as you like," said Octavia.

"Well, the man's in love with you."

Remembering her own scene with Eustace, Mrs. Galbraith slightly blushed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Octavia, blushing deeper still; "but why did he come to you?"

"Because he wanted to know whether he had a chance. If I say 'No' he goes out to India. What shall I say?"

"Just say nothing at all," said Octavia.

"But, Octavia, I think you are a woman who ought to marry again," continued Mrs. Galbraith.

"But why?"

"You have no object—outside the world, I

mean, and you're so young and charming, so much a part of the world, that you seem marked out for it."

"You never married again," returned Octavia.

"I'm so different."

"No, you are not—except that you are so unselfish. You have everything most men want—don't look horrified—and you can't prevent them worrying you. It is rather an odd coincidence after what you have just told me; but some one consulted me about you too. He wanted to know whether, under any circumstances, you would marry again."

Mrs. Galbraith started, and for a moment lost her head.

"It wasn't," she said—"it wasn't Eustace Fenner?"

Octavia did not miss the momentary confusion.

"No, no!" she exclaimed; "but what made you think of him?"

"I heard you had a long talk with him at Lady Elsmuir's the other night, and I fancied, perhaps, you might have spoken of me."

"Your name was not mentioned. Mr. Fenner would never think of speaking of such a subject with me," replied Octavia.

"Of course it was an absurd question on my part," said Mrs. Galbraith uneasily, feeling her friend's watchful eye.

"No, it wasn't Mr. Fenner," resumed Octavia, "but a much older man—one who admires you very much, but whose name you mustn't ask."

But Mrs. Galbraith was curious.

"I won't ask, of course," she said. "But how did he begin such an odd conversation?"

"You really want to know?" asked Octavia warningly—"really?"

"Certainly I do. No woman can help being inquisitive about such things."

"Well, first of all he asked me whether I

thought you would ever think of marrying Mr. Fenner; I replied that the idea was too ridiculous. Then he wanted to know whether you might not accept a man of character and position—the inference being that you could not possibly class Mr. Fenner among the eligible. But I emphatically told him that the man you would marry did not exist, or, if he did, I had never seen him.”

But here Octavia perceived the growing trouble on her friend’s face.

She sprang from her chair and kissed her.

“Oh, my dear,” she exclaimed, “I’m not telling you this because I’m a flippant, vulgar, gossiping wretch, but to put you on your guard. There is no man in the world good enough for you, and never has been. There, there! we won’t speak of it again. Refer your suitors to me, and I will settle with them.”

But Mrs. Galbraith recovered her equanimity.

She saw John Selby through Octavia's "man of character and position," and perceived how grievously her well-meaning efforts to unfreeze a cynical agnostic had been misinterpreted. However, she made up her mind to put him in his place the next time she saw him. It was her half-promise to Eustace weighed on her.

"But let us leave my affairs," she said to Octavia, whose affectionate caress had touched and soothed her. "The question is, what am I to tell Major King? Have you no message for him?"

"None," answered Octavia. "Let him go to India or stay at home, as he likes—so long as he doesn't worry you."

But it was time to dress for dinner.

Before going to her room Octavia went to see her little girl, and found her playing with her dolls. The child was singularly observant; two voyages to India had sharpened her precocity.

“Only think, mummie,” she said, “a man came here when we were away and wanted to marry Auntie Edith!”

“Auntie Edith” was Mrs. Galbraith.

This chance flash might account for the change in her friend, thought Octavia.

“How do you know?” she asked.

“Powell”—Powell was one of the housemaids—“told Nurse so—I heard her. It’s the man who teaches auntie Faith-Healing in Wigpole Street.”

The child saw the shock this announcement had made on her mother, and was proud of the effect produced, until Octavia told her sharply that only ill-bred little girls repeated servants’ gossip, and that if Auntie Edith heard she would be very angry.

At this point the maid returned.

“I was scolding Miss Edith for repeating gossip, Parker,” she said, turning to the young woman, “and I hope it will not occur again.”

Then, to avoid the explanation, she hastened from the room, leaving the aggrieved maid and the child to adjust the balances of the affront between them.

Here was the clew to the change in Mrs. Galbraith. No wonder she looked worried! The servants had guessed, and the rumor was afloat. It had a curious effect on Octavia; true or not, it had changed to aversion the contempt which she had tried not to feel for Eustace.

She saw a daring attempt of a practised hypocrite to reach prosperity and social security by means of the wealth of a trusting woman, but not one extenuating shade to excuse the offense.

As an adventurer, too, the man was a muddler! How could he imagine that she would not hear of it from Mrs. Galbraith, and, if she heard, not intervene?

Yet the whole thing might be idle rumor. The servants naturally gossiped of such a

mistress, and perverted the meaning of her intimacy with such a man.

“I must find out!” thought Octavia as she went down to dinner; “I must!”

And as they dined a cloud of ugly excitement seemed hanging over the table. Octavia, with hidden indignation, fancied the staid servants might be secretly deriding their mistress and “the man from Wiggpole Street.”

The evening was close. Thick thunderclouds were rolling in from the southwest, and after dinner the ladies sat by the balcony overlooking the darkling trees and the shining lights. The sounds of London reaching were subdued and muffled in the heavy air of the streets.

Mrs. Galbraith was conscious that Octavia suspected something. Her friend’s thoughts seemed converging toward the dread which oppressed her mind.

On the next evening there was to be a meeting in Wiggpole Street.

"Do you go to Wiggpole Street, to-morrow?" Octavia asked, closing in on the subject.

"No, not to-morrow."

"Mr. Fenner speaks, I see. You are afraid there may be some absurd talk about this new company—or whatever they call it—Lady Elsmuir's, I mean."

"No. Mr. Fenner has promised never to refer to that again, unless he shows up its absurdity."

There was a pause, during which Octavia decided to make a bold dash for the truth, since her friend refused to speak.

It was nearly dark where they sat; the twilight invited confidences.

"Do you know I have an awful suspicion!" said Octavia; "an awful one!"

"Dismiss it, then."

"I can't! It fills up all the spare spaces in my brain; only you can drive it out. I have been suspecting—forgive me for saying it, but

I feel I must—that Mr. Fenner means to ask you to marry him. Has he?”

“He has asked me,” came the reply.

“Oh!” gasped Octavia, clutching her friend’s hand.

“Why are you so horrified?” asked Mrs. Galbraith in an unsteady voice.

“I’m not, till you tell me what you said.”

“I said that he must give me six weeks to think it over.”

“Thank God!” cried Octavia, almost faint with the suspense. “That’s all right.”

Then a struggle occurred in her mind. Should she tell her friend of her own scene with the man at Lady Elsmuir’s? But there was her promise, the thing seemed too brutal, besides it might be told as a last resource.

“But how did you know?” asked Mrs. Galbraith.

“It was little Edie.”

“The servants! How dreadful!” exclaimed Mrs. Galbraith.

They sat for a minute in silence, which to Mrs. Galbraith now seemed full of shame.

“But you will never think of marrying him?” said Octavia at last.

“I might have to, to help him.”

“What a mad thing to say! The very idea makes you miserable. You shall not marry him. It can't help him, except to be idle. He is a dangerous adventurer, an impossible man.”

“Octavia! Octavia!” exclaimed Mrs. Galbraith.

“Forgive me, but I feel he is. I love you better than anybody, and you shall not marry him. It would be suicide.”

“But he cares for me; I feel he does.”

“As much as he can care for any one, perhaps. If you could only see with my eyes!”

“If you could only see with mine, Octavia!”

“But you don't love him.”

"No, except as a fellow-worker."

"He isn't. You're an angel, he is one of the parasites which make a living out of the faith of beautiful souls like you. Oh, you won't marry him. Please promise you won't," entreated Octavia, on the verge of tears.

But from the stress of the moment the other gathered resolution.

"You must not speak of poor Eustace so unkindly, Octavia," she said firmly. "You have no right to. You never liked him, you never understood him, you have never been fair to him. I have six weeks to decide, and can work out my fate in that time. Meanwhile, don't let us speak of it again. It only makes me unhappy, and does no good."

Octavia was about to speak, but Mrs. Galbraith rose to her feet.

"No, no!" she cried; "no more, not a word. I feel I can't bear it. Let me think it out, and all by myself."

“I won’t speak till the time is up,” said Octavia, “but I will speak then. Whatever happens you shall not marry him.”

CHAPTER XXII.

MEANWHILE Eustace, over the now hostile flower-shop, was awaiting the course of events with some anxiety.

In the first place he discovered that he had overlooked a danger in his haste to become a man of action and secure a bride worthy of his character and the place to which he hoped to rise in the world.

Would not Octavia Lee on her return to town, in spite of her promise, be tempted to tell Mrs. Galbraith of his proposal? The greatness of the temptation weighed upon him. He put himself in her place.

After all, a proposal was something to brag about, and human nature in women is unexpectedly alike.

But this was a risk with two barrels, either of which might shoot his prospects. Sooner

or later Octavia Lee must hear of his proposal to Mrs. Galbraith, unless the latter determined to reject him, in which case she would be anxious to spare his pride and her own. If, however, Octavia Lee were to hear that, a few hours after he had asked her to marry him, he had proposed to her friend, would she not prevent the marriage?

There could be no doubt how she would act in such a contingency. Eustace had been rash. If he had his chances over again, his policy would have been different. Why had he not announced to Mrs. Lee his undying affection for Mrs. Galbraith, and entreated her sympathy and assistance? Why had he risked so much on so poor a chance? He had instinctively felt that Mrs. Lee rather disliked him.

It was Cranley who tempted him, and his own desire to capture the malignant Selby as an unwilling father-in-law.

And as Eustace sat in the flowered morn-

ing-gown, contemplating risks bred of his own mistakes, he was candid enough to say, "Eustace! you acted like a fool!"

For rough use in a hard and practical world he was compelled to recognize the limitations, the deficiencies of his genial and kindly nature. He trusted others too much. The very success of his project now depended on the sense of honor in two women in dealing with the affections of a man who had proposed to both!

But so great was his belief in the sense of honor in either that he had risked his chances on it. This might be chivalry, but was it business? He was afraid it was not.

Another trouble, but of far less importance, was harassing him.

The Company of St. Peter, as Cranley, Secretary and Adviser, said, was "booming all along the line." The Cure Book was worth reading. Here is one of the earliest successes recorded, forwarded with the "Sec-

retary's compliments to the Editor of *The Torch*"—"The badly fractured arm—in spite of a surgeon's clumsy setting—of a lad of nine years—who had fallen from a kitchen dresser in his effort to reach a pot of jam on the topmost shelf—was induced to join almost instantaneously by the use of the Sacred Stone. In this case Mrs. Gryffon was the Healer."

"However awkwardly expressed the above," suggested Cranley, "surely the miracle is an interesting fact for comment."

It is true the medical version of the case was not mentioned. It was to this effect: "The bone, only partially broken, united very quickly, as is the case with children, and before Mrs. Gryffon, in search of willing invalids for experiment, had employed the Sacred Stone!"

Fenner, in his editorial capacity, ignored Mrs. Gryffon's cure. Then there was Lady Elsmuir's wonderful success with Benjamin

Thomson, brother of her coachman's wife. The unfortunate man, a dipsomaniac of several years' standing—if so inapplicable a figure of speech be allowed—was absolutely cured of his weakness by a single application of the stone.

The history of the case, also submitted to Eustace, who resolutely rejected it, will be found in the Company's Cure Book in Lady Elsmuir's handwriting.

Lady Elsmuir drove to a remote district in Hoxton where poor Thomson dwelt, and found him in a low state, depressed to the verge of tears.

She spoke to him of the physical and moral evils of drink.

"I know it, your ladyship," wailed Thomson; "I know it."

"Do you wish me to exorcise the demon of Drink?" she asked.

"I do, your ladyship," replied the poor fellow.

“Take this stone in your hand, then, Thomson,” said her ladyship. “Sit back in your chair, close your eyes, and repeat after me:—

HER LADYSHIP: “With this Sacred Stone of St. Peter I exorcise the demon of Drink out of thee, Benjamin Thomson.”

THOMSON (*as instructed*): “By this Sacred Stone of St. Peter, your ladyship exercises” (he had a little difficulty with the word) “the demon of Drink in me, Benjamin Thomson.”

“Are you trying to drive it out, Thomson?” inquired her ladyship.

“Tryin’ hard, your ladsyhip,” replied the anxious patient.

This formula was repeated thrice. The third time her ladyship said, “I think that will do, Thomson; you may open your eyes.”

Thomson did so, and smiled with so great an air of relief that Mrs. Thomson, his wife, was persuaded the demon left him the very moment her poor husband’s face changed.

"You feel you will never drink again," said her ladyship encouragingly, "don't you?"

"I feel, your ladyship, that I can't even bear the smell of sperets—me who was so partial to the flavor!"

"Then promise me to keep sober for six months and I'll give you a sovereign," said her ladyship, who always felt that faith ought to be substantially encouraged.

Thomson accepted the sovereign, but declared he should have had no difficulty in resisting the demon without such support.

Lady Elsmuir, full of pious pride at the good work accomplished, drove back to Grosvenor Square and received, a few days later, a comforting letter from the Rev. Herbert Sprung, vicar of Thomson's parish. "Thomson is a changed man," wrote the kindly divine; "he attributes his cure from the drink craze entirely to your miraculous intervention. He has now taken the pledge."

Under this interesting record, Cranley,

who had charge of the book, wrote: "A most unique and encouraging case."

In fact, all the Companions were more or less successful with their patients, even Mrs. Kinneston, who cured her bosom friend, a charming lady who had a half-share in a race-horse, of "the cigarette habit," and "in three goes," as she said in the frank, careless manner of women who feel themselves above the pedantic necessity of choosing their words.

But although Eustace, fearful of offending Mrs. Galbraith, refrained from mentioning any of these and other miracles, not without apologies to Cranley, such was the natural pride of the operators that their triumphs soon became a common topic of conversation in Wigpole Street, and Lady Elsmuir's case was actually honored with an article in *Anti-Drink*.

For Eustace did not believe in the Sacred Stones, and was therefore jealous—in the best sense of the word—of their success.

When, therefore, Mr. Cranley burst suddenly in on his musings, Eustace hoped that he had not come to insist on making him an ally.

Cranley's business, however, was of a far more personal nature.

It made poor Eustace turn cold, till he seemed almost to shrink under the flowered dressing-gown.

"Why, my dear Cranley!" exclaimed the secretly anxious Eustace, "what good wind blows you here?"

"It's a darned nasty easterly breeze, I guess," replied his visitor, with a queer suggestion of a relapse to earlier and less polished modes of speech.

"You alarm me," said Eustace; "but sit down."

Cranley took a seat, and looked a moment thoughtfully at the very pointed toes of his patent leather shoes.

"You've heard nothing from Selby?" he said after a moment.

"Nothing."

"You will soon."

"What makes you think so?"

"He began by ferreting in my tracks," said Cranley; "but the trail's a long one, and I guess its geography is rather against him. At any rate, now he is making private inquiries about you."

"What a ridiculous waste of time!" exclaimed Eustace.

"I'm glad of that," said Cranley; "I was afraid you were human."

"So I am, and not ashamed of my humanity."

"That's a very fine spirit, sir, and worthy of Wigpole Street. But think. Isn't there anything which, laid before such virtuous ladies as Mrs. Lee or Mrs. Galbraith, might damage your shining reputation?"

"Selby's a villain!" exclaimed Eustace.

"He is so," replied Cranley, "so we mustn't deal with him as though he were an

honest man like ourselves. However, you are all right. There's nothing in your conduct he can lay hold of. Remember he's your rival."

"Nothing I'm aware of," replied Eustace anxiously.

"It doesn't make a man feel quite cheerful, does it, now?" observed Cranley, who was watching the other's uneasiness with an inscrutable expression.

"It's a horrid feeling to know that unscrupulous rascals are hunting for defects in one's past life," said Eustace. "But how do you know they are?"

"One of the gentlemen at the Social Muck Rake Agency, as I call it, happens to be an acquaintance of mine. He left his show on account of moral scruples, and is now going in for clairvoyance. He told me they were looking up your account, and had run up against two items against you—angry creditors and a young lady who insists you

promised her marriage on an understanding not unusual in such cases."

"Oh, how wicked! I never did!" cried Eustace, no longer able to maintain a resolute face. "That horrible man is trying to destroy us both, Cranley, by means of false witnesses."

He now sought a desperate comfort in identifying his dangers with those threatening the resourceful Cranley, who watched him closely but said nothing.

"Of course," resumed Eustace, "you don't imagine, my dear Cranley, that I could be guilty of dishonorable dealings with any young woman, do you?"

"I've no imagination. Young ladies do arrive at erroneous conclusions regarding the intentions of their friends."

"No doubt, no doubt; but that is no excuse for my persecution."

Eustace felt that the other knew more than he pretended.

“What would you advise me to do?” he asked. “You who are so much more a man of the world than I.”

“If you want my help you must let me know exactly how you stand,” said Cranley.

“But you can see perfectly well.”

“I can’t. I don’t know whether you are to marry Mrs. Lee or Mrs. Galbraith,” he said.

“Nothing definite has been arranged,” said Eustace.

“Do you mean that you have asked them both, and neither can make up her mind, or that you can’t make up your mind which to choose?”

“My dear Cranley!” expostulated Eustace.

“What the thunder’s the use of talking like ‘a school marm’ when you’re in a tight place? It won’t help.”

“‘In a tight place!’” exclaimed Eustace.

“Yes, if the story about you and the girl reaches Wiggpole Street, Mrs. Galbraith will chuck you.”

Cranley's tone shocked Eustace; yet, in such an emergency, he felt he must submit to it.

"I have the deepest regard for Mrs. Galbraith," said Eustace, "and in all humility, love, and affection I entreated her to be my wife. She asked me to give her six weeks to decide. I am now anxiously waiting for her answer. That is exactly how the matter stands."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you!" said Cranley. "That means she'll say 'yes.' If, then, you can tide over this business for a week or two, you'll come out on the top."

"But suppose meanwhile this girl sues me for breach of promise of marriage," asked Eustace helplessly, "what shall I do then?"

"She'll have to be 'squared,' that's all. If you'll tell me the facts, I'll see her for you and try what can be done."

"How good of you!" cried Eustace.

"Who is she?"

“The girl in the flower shop below, Gladys Rodd,” said Eustace bashfully. “She seemed dull; her occupation monotonous. I tried to bring a little brightness into her life.”

“With the usual result,” suggested Cranley.

“Oh no! She wilfully misunderstood my—eh, meaning—my friendly attitude, I mean—pretended I wanted to marry her, and actually had the effrontery to tell me in the public street that I hadn’t heard the last of her yet!”

“Evidently she is a badly conducted minx,” replied Cranley.

“I’m afraid she is. Besides, she is so uncomfortably near!”

“She must be made to understand that she can get nothing by giving you away to our enemies,” said Cranley.

“But you’ll be careful,” said Eustace nervously. “She’ll say the most ridiculous things. She seems under a sort of hallucina-

tion, and is dreadfully unforgiving and vindictive. Still, I'm ready to make any sacrifice—even the sacrifice of truth—to prevent this story reaching Mrs. Galbraith."

"You leave it to me, and I'll make the very best bargain I can for you," said Cranley.

Then Cranley went down to Mr. Dane's shop and purchased a carnation for his coat, while Eustace, tormented with misgivings, waited for the result.

He felt that he had fallen lamentably from the paths of virtue; he was even conscious that there were men who would actually despise him as a hypocrite, yet he pitied rather than blamed himself. So subtle had been the nature of the temptation that it seemed to him the Spirit of Evil was bent on carrying out especially arranged maneuvers to compass his overthrow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN trusting Cranley to treat with Miss Rodd poor Eustace once more showed his want of worldly understanding. The white pigeon had made an alliance with the cunning cat, and for several days found comfort in the compact.

A brief written message from Cranley, which simply said, "Be patient and sit tight; all will come right," led him on with false hope.

He passed Miss Rodd twice in the street, and each time he raised his hat she inclined her head coldly. That she even deigned to return his salute struck him as of good augury. Still he was far from happy. The thinning congregation at Wigpole Street, the absence of Mrs. Galbraith, added to his depression. The services had lost their

warmth, their freshness. The rivalries of the Companions of St. Peter and their much-boasted cures made the mild testimonies of Wigpole Street appear very flat to religionists eager for new sensation. Of those who sat under him several hesitated, with a foot in either camp. "There must be," they thought, "something in Lady Elsmuir's new System, or she wouldn't take it up." By such waverers this subtle temptation had to be resisted. The Companions of St. Peter were all smart, exclusive people, whereas the New Christians ran well down into the middle classes.

On Monday following his Sunday address in Wigpole Street, Eustace went down to Brighton, where no one knew him. There was something in the long shining sea-front which always refreshed him. It was also Eustace's birthplace. His late father had been the first and last Prophet of an extinct sect known as the "Cock-crowers," whose

belief was that the end of the world would come at dawn on a 10th of May in leap year. A cryptogram discovered in Revelation by the Prophet Fenner fixed this date.

Eustace was naturally not anxious to advertise his connection with a forgotten sect and a discredited prophet remarkable for the unfulfilment of his predictions; still the place had many pleasant memories for him, though it knew him no longer.

He stayed at one of the smaller hotels on the west of the pier, and asked the sunshine and the salt breezes to restore his shaken calm.

As Eustace had been in love several times in his early youth amid these scenes, his mood naturally took a sentimental bias, and his affection for Mrs. Galbraith shone forth as the one crowning passion of his life. Already he was planning his future as a religious leader untrammelled by want of capital.

He would be so careful in future if only he

were allowed to get out of his present troubles and become the husband of the saintly woman of whom he thought so tenderly.

Two short weeks hence and he must receive his answer.

On Eustace's second morning he bathed in the cheerful blue waves, springing rhythmically up and down in their embrace as he had done as an innocent lad who had never learned how to swim. The illimitable sense of purity caught from the white foam made him feel so good, so hopeful. Fears and vengeful thoughts were alike forgotten as Eustace—rosy from his bath—strolled back from the beach along the sun-steeped parade toward his hotel, in cool flannel clothes and straw hat tilted over his eyes.

The parade at that moment was almost empty, and Eustace's glance embraced a prolonged stretch of sun-scorched asphalt.

But let no man boast that his soul is at peace! Suddenly, pleasantly languid and

warm as he was from the kiss of the sun and the kiss of the sea, Eustace beheld a familiar, tall, thin figure in blue serge and a Homburg hat approaching. His heart gave a horrid leap of apprehension as he recognized his arch-enemy John Selby.

Tempted for the moment to turn and flee in the other direction, Eustace's dignity prevailed over the passing weakness. Besides, it was plain that Selby saw him, and was coming straight to him, his face, it seemed to Eustace, distorted by a hideous cynical grin.

With a splendid effort of self-control, Eustace assumed a *débonnaire* manner.

"Ah! Mr. Selby. Odd we should meet! Came down, you know, just because I felt a little run down."

"It's an odder thing still," said Selby, omitting to see the hand which Eustace extended, "but I ran down to see you."

"No!" said Eustace bravely, but feeling sick.

“Yes, indeed!” replied John Selby, feeling cheerfully wicked. “I called at your rooms yesterday, and having ascertained that you were here, decided to come down to find out what arrangement you were prepared to make.”

“What arrangement I’m prepared to make!” repeated Eustace.

“Yes, for I’m willing to give you a chance—only with a condition, of course.”

“I’m quite at a loss to understand why you should adopt this tone to me, Mr. Selby,” said Eustace indignantly, regretting his inexperience as a fighter, and wondering whether it were possible to throw down his wrinkled foe on the asphalt and jump on him till he cried for mercy and forgiveness. The sight of a languid policeman in the shade of the neighboring Preston Street suggested more reasonable views.

“You’re at a loss, are you?” said Selby; “well, if you can stay here with me for five

minutes without risking sunstroke, I'll explain. I've found you out!"

"Surely this is midsummer madness!" exclaimed Eustace, who felt the hot asphalt on which he stood turning to ice.

"I also know all about your 'pal' Cranley," continued Selby, without heeding Eustace's unavailing flourish.

"He is no friend of mine," said Eustace proudly.

"Perhaps I ought to have said 'rival.' However, I intend you to show him up."

"I can't understand what you're aiming at!" said Eustace, whom the blue horizon of sea and sky behind Selby's hat now seemed to mock.

"It is simple, and I'll explain. I have discovered that Cranley is a rogue and impostor. The story of the Sacred Stones is an invention. The saint who carved and blessed them is a Dutch Jew in Whitechapel. They are less than a year old. Cranley did visit

the Holy Land, but as the paid guide and lecturer to a party of school marms from Boston. He was never ill there, and, of course, never cured by the mysterious Christian whose tribe never existed."

"How very dishonest!" exclaimed Eustace.

"Shocking, isn't it!" returned John Selby contemptuously. "But this isn't all. You come in now, Mr. Fenner."

"What, I? I'm perfectly innocent; except, like other too credulous people, I was deceived too."

"My good man, let us be frank; it's so much less fatiguing. You were bribed. There's nothing uncommon in that. Cranley gave you five hundred pounds to write up his Sacred Stones in the—what d'you call it?—*Torch*. Thanks to your puffing, Lady Elsmuir worried her absurd husband into buying a stone. Now there is another mad sect let loose, and I want you to help me smash it. If you do, I'll not say a word about the five

hundred pounds, or the little girl in the flower shop whom you promised to marry.”

“I shall be pleased to help you so far as I honestly can, Mr. Selby, in exposing an impostor, but not in consequence of your threats. Cranley never bribed me. I repudiate the charge—the money has been honorably disposed of, as I shall show—nor did I ever offer marriage to the untruthful young woman whose name you, with singular want of good feeling, have dragged into the conversation.”

“All right, we won’t argue. It’s too hot. Our views of what constitutes fraud are so very different. This is my ultimatum: if, at your next meeting, you do not tell them what sort of impostor Cranley is, I’ll lay the whole thing before your committee and stop your little game for good. On the other hand, show Cranley up and denounce the rival sect of Healers, and you will appear a hero to your admirers, and may rely not only

on my silence but on my modified support."

Although the much-trying Eustace seemed to hear the crash of his falling fortunes, yet he still strove hard to reclothe the situation with dignity. The desperate effort at moral redecoration was worthy of his courage, and assumed the following shape:

"Your view, I take it, Mr. Selby, is that whatever indiscretion an unworldly confidence in my fellow-men may have tempted me to commit, you consider the mistake will be amply atoned for if I denounce the false sect which is the offspring of Cranley's duplicity."

"Very prettily put indeed, Mr. Fenner, and worthy of Wigpole Street. You have grasped my meaning as I expected. Do you intend to accept my proposal, which I consider a generous one?"

"Give me until to-morrow to decide," said Eustace,

Selby reflected a moment.

“I will give you till four o'clock to-morrow. If I don't hear from you at the 'Albany' before that, I shall go to Mrs. Galbraith and tell her of the bribe and of your treatment of the young woman, and of your general unfitness for the position you now occupy as a moral teacher. Now I'm going to lunch.”

Selby turned his back on Eustace and walked off.

Eustace remained overwhelmed with the horror of the moment, his eyes turned yearningly toward the dancing sea shining in pitiless indifference to his danger. There was no escape. The wretched Selby had cornered him.

But man must lunch though his heart break. Eustace walked back to his hotel only to see Selby leisurely mounting the steps a hundred yards in front of him.

To lunch in the same room with this elderly, jaunty terror would be to find poison in

the most wholesome food. To avoid this Eustace retreated and sought the hospitality of a neighboring restaurant, where he ordered a steak and a pint of Beaune.

Refreshed by his meal he hurried to his room, packed his bag, paid his bill. The porter was calling a fly to drive him to the station at the moment Selby, with a cigar in his mouth, appeared in the hall.

“Good-bye!” cried Selby. “I shall expect to hear from you to-morrow.”

As the fly turned its back on the bright prospect of blue sea, the melancholy fare within understood how the gallant spirits, rattling toward the guillotine, felt on the timbrels during the Terror.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EUSTACE arrived in London without a definite plan. He was, as he often told himself, a man of thought, not a man of action. Even his faith was shaken, since he could find no remedy in it for the threatening danger. Just as the hansom set him down before his door the shutters at Dane's shop were about to be put up, and Miss Rodd, arrayed for the street, standing on the threshold, gave him a supercilious stare.

Why not try the force of an appeal to her generosity?

Raising his hat politely with one hand, and bearing the Gladstone bag containing his simple toilet requisites in the other, Eustace dared to approach her.

"Ah, Miss Rodd!" he exclaimed in a voice full of respectful emotion, "little you think as

you stand there in the fulness of youth and beauty that base wretches are using you as a means to compass my ruin."

"What on earth do you mean?" she said. "I told mother about you, and she wanted me to bring an action for breach of promise against you. At one time I thought I would, but there's no reason for it now, and I despise you so, Mr. Fenner, that I wouldn't marry you if you were the Bank of England. So there!"

Was it possible, then, that there was light in the darkness after all?

"You are unjust to me," said Eustace, repressing a natural instinct to thank her warmly, "and although I'm used to injustice, I'm afraid your mother has been talking with small consideration of your own unquestioned character."

"She always does talk. I can't help that," retorted Miss Rodd. "People have been asking questions about you, and her temper's

short. Still, I've made her understand my name isn't to be coupled with yours, and that if she told any one I knew you except as a customer with an unpaid account I'd leave home and live in lodgings! A nice fellow you are to have your name mentioned along with that of a lady!"

"I am equally ready to declare I never saw you except as a customer—for your sake, of course, Miss Rodd," said Eustace. "But I sent you a message through Mr. Cranley, a friend of mine, the other day."

"A friend of yours, is he?"

"Yes. I told him there was no sacrifice I would not make to protect your good name if only you would consent to take no hasty step. What did he say?"

"He came in and bought a flower, and then asked questions about you. A nice character he gave you too! He told me you were the sort of man young women ought to be warned against! And when I said I

didn't know you and didn't want to, he said he could quite understand that. Then he went on wondering what women could see in such a chap as you, and told me you were to marry a middle-aged woman for her money."

"Good heavens!" said Eustace, losing his head; "he told me you were going to bring a breach-of-promise action against me."

"Then he must have heard some of mother's silly talk before I made her shut up. But I wish you a good evening, Mr. Fenner, and the less I see of you the better I shall be pleased!"

Then, with a contemptuous switch of her blue serge skirts, Miss Rodd hurried off just as the boy rattled up the last shutter, leaving Eustace to mount the narrow stairs to his rooms with a horrible suspicion that he had been treated like a fool.

He sat in the gathering dark for nearly an hour, and the more he thought the greater grew his hatred of Cranley. Evidently Sel-

by's agents, who had run Cranley's character to earth, had also "pumped" old Mrs. Rodd, but before her daughter's pride had found time to healthily reassert itself.

After due reflection, however, Miss Rodd had made up her mind that she was none the worse for her brief incursion into the science of Wigpole Street. Her training as a florist, moreover, had doubtlessly taught her that it was ridiculous for a girl to sue a man with no means at the expense of her character.

Danger from this quarter, therefore, did not exist. Here was relief for Eustace of a very substantial kind. But what of the other danger? Probably the ugly story of the £500 had reached Selby through Mrs. Palgrave, Cranley's confederate and ally. If only Eustace had the money he would have forwarded it to a hospital at once. Unfortunately his balance at the bank was once more represented by an overdraft. Of course, if it came to the worst, he might announce his inten-

tion of presenting the sum in question to some charity at Christmas and explain the delay on the grounds that he was conscientiously seeking the most worthy object for the offering. In any case, if Selby carried out his threat, Eustace knew his chances with Mrs. Galbraith would be ruined. His one hope, therefore, of escape was to attack Cranley, his Sacred Stones, and the "Companions of St. Peter," who were the dupes. Here, at any rate, was splendid and dramatic vengeance, even if Eustace himself became the victim of the ruin he created.

He now hated Cranley more bitterly than he detested Selby.

And as he reflected it was borne in on him from without—as it seemed by some secret power—that his best policy was to denounce Cranley and to lay bare the follies of the clique now swaggering under the auspices of Lady Elsmuir.

Without further delay he wrote to John

Selby announcing this intention, not, as he pointed out, in consequence of the latter's threats, but as a pious duty, revealed after much serious musing.

"Judas himself," he said, "was no greater traitor than the man Cranley."

By return of post he received the following answer on a halfpenny card:

"Pleased to learn decision and your opinion on traitors, but why not master the art of laughing at yourself? Life is made so much pleasanter by a simple accomplishment necessary to all religious inventors for their personal encouragement."

"Blatant atheist dog!" cried Eustace, as he tore up this cheap and unprovoked sneer.

The two remaining days he spent in preparing his address. The subject of his discourse was "Miracles in their relation to Faith and Credulity."

On the morning of the eventful day Eustace strolled, in search of peace and fresh air,

into Kensington Gardens, where, under the trees facing the Serpentine, he suddenly came on Major King and Octavia Lee.

In spite of the crisis threatening him, Eustace could still think of others, and suddenly he felt anxious for Octavia's future.

Here was a beautiful woman whose atrophied and worldly soul he had vainly attempted to awaken, who had rejected his suit with disdain, in danger of marrying a big commonplace soldier who actually believed that the manhood of the country needed military training. Eustace could not forget a contemptuous little utterance of the Major's at one of those fatal evenings at Mrs. Galbraith's.

"What all you clever, eloquent people want, Mr. Fenner, to make you think straight, is just a little old-fashioned drill-sergeant discipline."

When Eustace cried out against such "barbarous folly," the Major had replied, "See

what it has done for the Germans, with all their faults. Thanks to the drill-sergeant, they have almost forgotten to talk 'rot' outside the newspapers."

But in such a harassed moment of his own affairs it was impossible for Eustace to warn the foolish young woman of the danger into which she was so heedlessly running.

But those stupid, thick-headed soldiers! Eustace felt he had no patience with them.

He pretended, however, not to see them, and was passing by, his eyes fixed in deep meditation on the grass, when Octavia Lee called him. He started suddenly, with quite a natural spontaneity, raised his hat, and approached their chairs.

The Major was cheerful, Octavia smiling.

"I scarcely expected to see any one I knew in so secluded a spot," said Eustace, in impartial but gentle reproof of an intimacy his best instincts discouraged. "To me the sylvan suggestions of the place are most restful."

"It's possible to get quite fifty yards away from a cockney accent," said the Major.

"Talking of accents," said Octavia, "do you speak this evening?"

To Eustace, who wondered anxiously "how much she knew," the question seemed of doubtful import.

"Yes," he replied. "It is a most important moment in the history of our little community. I hope Mrs. Galbraith will be there. You, I know, Mrs. Lee, are outside our pale."

"I don't know whether Mrs. Galbraith will be there," said Octavia; "but when she hears how much importance you attach to the meeting I'm sure she will want to come."

"Octavia Lee hasn't been told," thought Eustace.

"She shall not go if I can help it," thought Octavia.

Yet between these hostile thoughts there was no conflict.

"What's the new sensation at Wiggpole Street, Mr. Fenner?" asked Major King.

Eustace reflected a moment. If he told them it would reach Mrs. Galbraith, who would at once understand the heroism of his act.

"I am not quite sure what you mean by a sensation, Major King," he replied coldly; "but I have a most painful duty to perform. I have ascertained that Mr. Cranley, the discoverer of the so-called Sacred Stones, is an impostor, and intend to denounce him tonight in my official capacity. At all costs, at all risks, I shall do my duty."

"Then you'll have to show up Lady Elsmuir and the Companions of St. Peter, too," said the Major. "How painful, to be sure!"

"So far as they are his dupes they must suffer with him. The task, as you perceive, is a stern one," answered Eustace. "But I must beg of you not to announce my purpose to any one except Mrs. Galbraith. If it were

generally known the strongest pressure would be brought to bear on me to close my lips and silence my just indignation."

"What a fine *coup de théâtre* it'll be!" observed the Major.

Eustace raised his arched eyebrows in disapproval, but checked his retort.

"You may rely on us to keep your secret," said Octavia, "even from Mrs. Galbraith, if you wish it."

"But I would prefer that she should know," Eustace replied; "she alone will fully appreciate my motive."

"Then she shan't know," thought Octavia.

"But will the other party take it sitting, I wonder?" asked Major King.

"I hope all concerned in the absurd movement will be made thoroughly ashamed of the part they have played," said Eustace. "Dangerous religious parasites such as this impostor Cranley obstruct all real spiritual progress."

"Quite so," said the Major, who felt that he had had enough of the conversation.

It was now equally distasteful to Eustace.

"But I must go now; I am very busy," he said. He raised his hat; the Major touched his with a meager respect. Eustace walked off, his hands behind him, with plump, round shoulders bent and head sunk in his breast.

"Looks quite like a genius, doesn't he?" observed the Major, as his glance followed the other's retreating figure.

"I'm never sure what he does look like," replied Octavia; "but I mean to hear him to-night."

"Do let me take you!" entreated the Major.

"Certainly—if you won't tell Mrs. Galbraith what Mr. Fenner intends to say."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not want her to go."

"Well, the fellow is her protégé, isn't he?"

“Yes, but I want to get her out of his clutches.”

“Surely she would never think of——”

The Major did not care to finish his sentence.

“She might.”

“What a horrible fate for such a woman!” exclaimed the Major. “Of course that’s what the fellow is after.”

Major King looked uncomfortable. “What on earth does she mean in mixing herself up with such a lot for!” he wondered.

But Octavia made no answer.

That they were sitting in the Gardens that morning was due to a match-making maneuver on Mrs. Galbraith’s part. The Major felt it impossible to criticise a woman who was so wholly on his side.

“Octavia likes you,” she had said two hours before, “but don’t be in a hurry.”

“It doesn’t bore you, sitting here, does it?” he asked, recalling this warning with a sense of misgiving.

“Not in the least; but I feel it’s time we walked back,” Octavia replied.

“She shied off at what she fancied I was going to say,” he thought, and the whole of that afternoon he was afraid to say it.

Why would she not help him? He was quite sure that Mrs. Galbraith had told her. Suddenly the Major found himself growing painfully shy. This young woman, who knew that he was fond of her, treated him so much as an old friend that she made the jump across wider than his wit, spurred by his affection, dared attempt. “I must,” he thought, “look like a fool!” This made him appear sulky, and killed his power of small talk.

They walked back to Hyde Park Gardens in constrained silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

As a preparation for the trying ordeal in Wiggole Street, Eustace, contrary to his practice, dined first. A certain shrinking of his heart called for the comfort of champagne. He sometimes upbraided himself for his fondness for the costly stimulant, but on the evening which was to make or mar him his soul cried out for it, nor would his conscience permit him to refuse the claim. Resolutely he finished the bottle. When, therefore, he found himself on the platform facing his audience, the dramatic spirit had entirely mastered the apprehension which grows of chill morning reflection. Through a rosy haze he seemed to see victory.

He felt as a man with a great duty before him, in which all personal risks must be forgotten. And when he fell on the phrase,

"We must sacrifice everything, even our own happiness, to love of truth," he knew that he had struck the pitch to which his own conduct must be attuned, at least for that night.

The room was full. He saw Major King and Octavia Lee in the third row, but was annoyed to miss the calm, encouraging eyes of Mrs. Galbraith. Why was she not there? But the wine bubbles danced gallantly in his heart, and there was no time for conjecturings. Near the door stood Selby, waiting patiently for the explosion he had prepared; ready, if Eustace shirked, to fire the train himself. In the lecturer's pocket was a hastily pencilled note with such a warning, handed to him as he stepped on the platform by the attendant with a whispered "Most important, sir." Eustace read it with wine-cheered eyes fearlessly, and replied, "Say, 'All right.'" The message reached and gratified John Selby.

In the gallery, behind an angle of a pillar,

unseen by Eustace on his platform, sat Cranley and Mrs. Palgrave: the former wondering at Eustace's recent inaction, and, because he regarded him as a self-indulgent coward, disbelieving a danger of which some hint had reached him through Mrs. Kinneston, to whom, at Ranelagh, the day before, Selby had said, "Come to the fun at Wigpole Street to-morrow. There will be the deuce of a row. Mr. Fenner has some remarks to offer on the nature of miracles, which will make the Companions of St. Peter 'sit up.'"

This hint Mrs. Kinneston conveyed to Lady Elsmuir, who, misunderstanding its real purport, replied, "Mr. Fenner can tell me nothing about miracles I don't know. Besides, I hate long lectures. Faith is action, not talk. But I'll tell Mr. Cranley to attend. He may pick up something useful."

Thus Cranley received the order and replied, like the optimist he was, that Mr. Fenner could say nothing on the subject of

the Healing Stones which would not point of their divine origin. The Companions of St. Peter, therefore, assembled full of curious expectancy, prepared to enjoy the triumph they anticipated.

Eustace commenced amid a restrained murmur of excitement with an imposing air of complete mastery over his subject, although those nearest noticed a peculiar brightness in his eye and color in his cheek. The subject of his discourse he announced as "Miracles in their relation to Faith and Credulity." Had the lecturer come into the world early in the eighteenth century, and before David Hume was born, he might have added something new to a time-worn topic, but he found little to say that was novel even to a Wigpole Street audience which is not versed in philosophies, and, so far as the commencement of his address was concerned, Lady Elsmuir lost little by her absence. When, however, he left the deserts of the

abstract for the practical or impractical religious interests of his flock, his audience rustled audibly.

“Hume,” said Eustace, “a writer who has exercised a weight far beyond his intellectual worth, defines a miracle as ‘a violation of the laws of nature,’ which is absurd. A miracle, as we understand it in Wiggpole Street, is the practice of the spiritual laws which rule nature. A miracle is faith in its concrete form. As mental energy and the power of belief grow, the meaning of the word has changed. To us a true miracle is merely the outward and visible manifestation of power of faith. We no longer employ the word, however, since, when we heal through the agency of faith, we simply obey a divine instinct and achieve a result regarded as abnormal only in consequence of the appalling ignorance of the environing crowd. Many of those, moreover, who speak of miracles, and pretend, or possibly even persuade

themselves, that they practice them, are the melancholy dupes of impostors.”

Here the audience became visibly agitated, and Cranley whispered sacrilegious things in Mrs. Palgrave’s adjacent ear.

“Be quiet!” she whispered, “and wait till he has finished.”

“We have lately endured in our very midst the sad spectacle of a frivolous desire for what is sensational in the practice of Mind Healing,” continued Eustace. “For this I am partly responsible, and now entreat your forgiveness. Had it not been for an error of judgment on my part, probably none of you would have heard of a person named Cranley, or of his so-called Sacred Stones. Against this man, his vulgar magic, and the well-meaning people who have been made his dupes, my duty compels me now to warn you.”

“Hear! hear!” cried Selby.

“Hush! hush!” murmured the audience, unused to unseemly interruptions.

“This,” continued Eustace, with the first tremor of misgiving in his voice, “is the story. The stones were invented by Cranley—Cranley, behind whom there lies a dubious career, and whom experience has taught that the stock of human credulity is inexhaustible. A man of science, a personal friend, though our views widely differ, has traced the pitiful story for me to its vulgar origin. The Sacred Stones of St. Peter were never blessed by the Saint, but owe their origin to Mr. Cranley’s cunning and the knife of the lapidary—a Dutch Jew dwelling in Whitechapel. This Dutch Jew we can produce. The whole story of the Arab tribe and of the miraculous Healing Stones is false. It has been used successfully as a bait, because I was credulous enough to tell the story in the *Torch*, a mistake for which I do now most bitterly repent. Such being the origin of the Sacred Stones, the cures wrought in their name must be fraudulent. I call, therefore, on the Com-

panions of St. Peter to disband, to cease all dealings with the adventurer Cranley, whose dupes they are, and to return to the community whose teachings they have abandoned for the cheap magic of the impostor. Such frantic wanderings as that which we have just witnessed from the paths of New Christian teaching make our methods appear ridiculous in the eyes of the mocking and unbelieving crowd. My painful duty has now been done, and I trust I may not be compelled to return to this painful topic."

The speaker sat down amid growing murmurs of excitement, but when he heard the voice of Cranley, whose presence, had it been suspected, would have modified the discourse, Eustace's heart began to sink, for he had not anticipated so prompt a reply, and the daring due to the exhilaration of the sparkling wine had now outworn itself.

Then, amid a murmur of eager excitement, Eustace sat down with the air of a man who

has said the last final and weighty word on a topic on which further discussion is impossible.

But a strident voice burst upon the audience. "Wait a minute!" it cried, "I'll let you know where to look for fraud, now the scandal has been let loose."

Then Mr. Cranley leaned over the gallery and addressed the audience in accents of unfaltering brass; he was heard in almost complete silence, thanks to the admirable custom of Wigpole Street, which allows to every speaker a fair hearing, whatever his testimony may be.

"It is," he said, "fortunate that I am here to defend my own character against an unwarrantable charge, and to protect the Companions of St. Peter against an odious calumny. Before judging let me give you the facts of the case."

Here Eustace sprang to his feet, and was about to speak; but the lady official who gave

out the hymns restrained him, and he sat down with rumpled hair and pale face.

“He is losing his nerve,” whispered Mrs. Palgrave.

“Thought he would!” returned Cranley. “I perceive,” he resumed, when Eustace had sat down, “that Mr. Fenner is very anxious I should not reply to the un-Christian attack which he has been compelled to make by a man who is the enemy of us both. That man is present among us to-night—a wicked and blatant unbeliever.”

“You’re an impudent rascal!” shouted Selby.

“Sh-sh-sh-sh! hush! hush!” murmured the audience, to check the interruption and eager for fair play.

“That the story of the Sacred Stones was revealed first to you in the columns of the *Torch* is perfectly true, only Mr. Fenner has not told you that I paid him five hundred pounds for the advertisement!”

shouted Cranley. "He hasn't told you that!"

"Oh! oh!" moaned the now thoroughly startled New Christians, glancing up to the platform where Eustace sat, white, desperate, yet defiant.

"That is a lie!" he cried.

"Bravo!" cried Selby encouragingly.

"Hush!" cried his neighbors, and the chairs rattled as those in the remoter ends of the room climbed on them to look in the direction of the interruption.

"Your C.P.T.* says it is a lie," resumed Cranley. "I admit the shadow of an inaccuracy. To spare Mr. Fenner's feelings, the money was given him to hand over to the worthiest charity which he could select. He selected himself."

"Another lie!" shouted Eustace. "I have not yet decided on the charity."

"I had a sacred cause to push," continued

* Christian Pathology Teacher.

Cranley, "and he is not the sort of man to bribe quite openly."

But when the audience glanced toward their teacher their eyes were full of disappointment and suspicion.

"While your worthy teacher was in doubt," Cranley went on coolly, "the money was spent. Let him show your committee his bank-book. But with that I have nothing to do. Mr. Fenner admits the publication of the story in the *Torch*; he also admits the receipt of the five hundred pounds. Will he deny that the attack which he has just made is due to the fact that our common enemy bullied him into making it?"

"Yes," said Eustace; "I spoke because I learned from certain inquiries which have been made concerning your past and present career, that you are a scamp and an impostor who, if he had his deserts, would be now a convict picking oakum."

Their voices were now drowned in sounds

of indignation among the audience, in the trampling of feet and the crash of falling chairs, as the Faithful, shocked almost to the point of tears by what they had heard, crowded toward the door to escape. All exit, however, was stopped by the curious, who blocked the doorways, some of them standing on chairs in order to obtain a better view. The character of the meeting had changed, and now rather resembled an angry political gathering than one seeking religious instruction.

“Give out the hymn!” bawled Eustace to the lady director. She opened a hymn-book, and made an effort to restore calm; but the audience were all looking toward the gallery where Cranley, waving his arms, was endeavoring to make himself heard above the confusion.

He was saying “dreadful things about Mr. Fenner,” as those nearest whispered to those who pushed and trampled behind.

“The scamp whom you permit to delude you,” shouted Cranley, “has all the vices. He is a gay Lothario under the prim mantle of a C.P.T., and if you don’t look out he’ll end in marrying——”

But the sentence was not finished, for an arm pulled Cranley back.

“An odd pair to fight for disciples!” said the Major to Octavia, who was feeling utterly ashamed.

“I’m so sorry!” she exclaimed.

“For whom?”

“For Mrs. Galbraith.”

But they had not seen the worst of it yet.

Eustace, eager to escape, hurried away the moment Mrs. Palgrave stopped Cranley in his last attack. The door at the back of the platform gave him a long start. He reached the hall just as the audience was about to overflow it, but ran against Cranley descending from the gallery, full of cold fury.

“You’re a pretty cur!” he said.

“You vile, ignorant, coarse hound, you dare!” cried the infuriated Eustace.

Then in the midst of the crowd the two religious teachers flew at each other’s throat. Eustace seized Cranley by the collar, which burst open; Cranley struck Eustace full in the face with his fist; women shrieked, and one stout, middle-aged lady bravely tried to separate them.

Unfortunately there were no men near, and for a few seconds the combatants grappled like stags among the hinds.

Down Eustace’s face the blood was streaming; Cranley was half lamed by a furious kick from an assailant whose ideas of fighting owed nothing to the chivalry of the ring.

“They are killing one another!” shrieked the frightened women, against whom the combatants recklessly staggered. Probably they would have rolled down the steps had not Major King clutched the wrist of Cranley’s hand, which grasped a lock of Eustace’s

luxuriant hair, and finally parted the panting, gasping enemies.

Eustace was weeping with rage and humiliation; Cranley, white and wicked.

Meanwhile Selby, behind the crowd, in safe enjoyment of a scene far surpassing his highest expectations, kept carefully aloof from the struggling foes lest their combined fury should be turned against the head that had provoked their madness.

After Major King had forced them apart, some one handed Eustace his hat, and he hurried off down the steps in heavy breathing silence and disappeared.

"What were you fighting about?" asked the Major.

"Darned if I'm sure," replied Cranley, from whom the humorous view of things was never long absent, "but I fancy it's what that kicking wild ass would call 'excess of religious zeal.' Jerusalem! but he has nigh broke my tibia."

"Come!" whispered Mrs. Palgrave, who stood behind him, pulling his sleeve. "Come."

"You've had a pretty show, at all events," said Cranley, as he walked off endeavoring vainly to adjust his torn collar and cravat.

The excited and disgusted audience now streamed into the street, too much moved to be articulate, while Selby, in high spirits, joined his daughter and the Major.

"You owe this splendid dramatic exposition to me," he said. "My little trick set them by the ears. Grand, wasn't it? I ran the foxes to earth!"

He gave them a sketch of Cranley's career as they walked down Wigpole Street, his manner becoming almost genial from the sense of satisfied mischief. He had "shown up" the Companions of St. Peter and now looked forward to the reward which he thought Mrs. Galbraith could no longer fairly withhold.

“I was a little surprised,” said he, in conclusion, “not to see Mrs. Galbraith at the meeting. The revelations would have given her a painful but much-needed lesson. Don’t you think, Tavia, I had better come back with you and let her know the results of my inquiries?”

But Octavia guessed what was working in her father’s mind.

“Mrs. Galbraith won’t be in till late,” she replied. “Major King will see me home.”

The Major’s eyebrows jumped right up to his hair in disapproval. This was the first story he had ever heard Octavia tell.

“That’s a nuisance,” replied Selby. “Will you tell her, then, I’ll call to-morrow afternoon to lay some very curious information before her?”

“Very good,” replied Octavia, conscious of the sudden coldness in the Major’s manner.

Selby stopped a passing hansom, and told the man to drive to his club. He was eager

to tell his story in the smoking-room, where its mixed flavor of hypocrisy and comedy would, he knew, be best appreciated. But the Major and Octavia walked on for awhile in silence.

“What did you mean by saying Mrs. Galbraith was not at home when you knew she was?” he said, at last.

“It must have been because I wasn’t prepared with an honest excuse. Necessity laid an ambush for me, and in I walked. I would be wickeder still not to prevent Mrs. Galbraith from being worried.”

“You’ve no business in ambushes of that kind,” said the Major, “especially after the little game we saw to-night. I always knew that fellow Fenner was a humbug. Lord! how they clawed one another. The other is the better sportsman.”

“Do you mind calling a hansom?” said Octavia.

The Major raised his cane, and a brisk, jingling cab drove up, the irritable little horse

in the shafts petulantly shaking an ominously powerful bit.

“A beast of a horse!” said the Major.
“Hadn’t I better come too?”

“No, thank you. Tell him where to drive, please. Good night!”

“Good night!” replied the Major ruefully.

The cab dashed off.

“That’s to punish me for not admiring her even when she tells lies,” reflected the Major.

“How like a woman!”

He misread Octavia, however, who was not displeased his disapproval of lying should be emphatic enough to make him seem surly. She chose this simple means of getting rid of the Major in order to be alone with Mrs. Galbraith.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON the following morning the storm burst on a public greedy for scandalous fun. The "painful scene in Wiggpole Street," to quote the most reticent newspaper poster, spread consternation through the perturbed ranks of the New Christians and their offshoots. For the first time they were conscious that they looked ridiculous.

Selby had taken care that highly trained reporters should be present at the fateful meeting. One of them, skilled in American methods of journalism, interviewed Mr. Cranley, who made it perfectly clear that he and his Sacred Stones were the object of an unscrupulous plot originating among the religionists of Wiggpole Street, who were jealous of the growing power of the "Companions of St. Peter." The most lurid details of Eus-

tace's present conduct and past career, however, were suppressed by a pusillanimous editor, fearful of libelling the rankest offender before he became fully recognized as a permanent member of the criminal classes; but enough was published to ruin the most promising reputation for religious originality.

The full blast of gossip and scandal which the morning papers, but especially the premature fruits of evening journalistic enterprise, presented to their readers, struck Mrs. Galbraith before John Selby, newly decorated from Truefitt's, called to taste the joys of victory.

A selfish, elderly Perseus, fresh from rescuing a matronly Andromeda from an allegorical sea-beast, might have felt similar satisfaction. Had he not slain the snake of humbug and hypocrisy at Wigpole Street, and made Lady Elsmuir and her Companions of St. Peter appear supremely absurd? Cant and

nonsense dared not look on the bright shield of John Selby.

"It really was dev'lish clever of me," he thought as he rang the bell and hugged his complacency.

Mrs. Galbraith received him in the library. Unlike poor Eustace, he knew nothing of the history of the room, and the meaning which he attached to his reception in it was wholly flattering.

But he was not quite prepared for the look in Mrs. Galbraith's eye, nor, indeed, for the course the conversation took.

"Have you read the papers?" he asked.

"As many as I could get," she answered.

"The *Planet*, with its vulgar account of a 'fight between rival religionists,' is the funniest," continued Selby sympathetically; "still I'm glad you were not present; you would have been greatly shocked."

"Octavia prepared me for the feast," Mrs. Galbraith replied. "She also told me of your

efforts to protect us against adventurers in Wigpole Street. The result is the ruin of the poor young man whom we were foolish enough to trust and whom I am still weak enough to pity."

"Whatever I did," replied Selby, "was with the motive of pleasing and helping you."

"Like the child who has been flogged, Mr. Selby," she answered, "I am quite incapable at present of feeling gratitude toward the hand that wielded the whip. The lesson has, no doubt, been good for me, but the smart is still too keen to permit me to enjoy the benefit. Theoretically I am obliged to you for creating such horrible confusion, but actually I cannot help fancying that the good work which I perceive you are conscious of having accomplished was quite as much actuated by a sense—or shall I say love of sport—as by the desire to benefit me."

"My dear lady," replied Selby, unprepared for a counter attack at the moment selected

for his own triumph, "you scarcely do me justice. Of course there is a certain pleasure in showing up humbugs, still, I assure you, I find no extraordinary personal enjoyment in a success which has mortified you."

The conversation was shaping itself most clumsily. Mrs. Galbraith, according to all precedents, after admiring his ability and foresight as a man of the world, should have thanked him for defeating the two impostors whose overthrow he had so skilfully planned.

Instead of this she seemed to regard him as a mischief-maker who had robbed her of a comfortable illusion.

["What the devil's the use of trying to do a woman a good turn?" he wondered peevishly.]

"What has happened is ended," said Mrs. Galbraith, "so if you don't mind we won't discuss the merits either of Mr. Fenner or Mr. Cranley."

"Exactly," said Selby, "it is to the future

to which we must look; and yours—a prey to dangers as it is—fills me with misgiving. The cool head and strong brain of the man of the world is the one sure protection for a nature so trusting and a heart so noble as yours.”

[“What does she think of that for an offer?” Selby wondered. “The slightest hint, and I’m her man.”]

The hint was never given, nor did Mrs. Galbraith flinch. She felt that she disliked Mr. Selby quite as much as she pitied Eustace; the patronizing offer of the “cool head and strong brain” presented itself to her mind in so revolting a shape that the man-of-the-worldly imagination was incapable of picturing it.

Even Selby’s vanity perceived before she answered that his proposal would not be jumped at.

“It must seem ridiculous to you, Mr. Selby,” she replied, “but I would rather risk

the adventurer than suffer the man of the world of the 'cool head and strong brain' with whom you threaten me."

["She doesn't seem to understand," thought Selby. "I must be still more direct."]

And so he made a courageous effort—speaking slowly and deliberately as a mathematical lecturer addressing listeners whose powers of comprehension he doubts.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will permit me to explain. We have reached a moment in our lives when a misunderstanding might be fatal to the happiness of both. I feel that I am still young enough to make a good woman happy—perhaps even to compensate her for past disappointments and lost illusions. Edith Galbraith! I am no dabbler in emotional phrases, but a man of quiet habit and affectionate disposition. It is the sincerest admiration of your personal charms and the deepest regard for your character which have prompted me to ask you to be my wife."

But although he felt the proposal could not have been made in a more gentlemanlike manner, he was deeply mortified by the manner in which it was received. Mrs. Galbraith's gentle face seemed turning to stone under the patronage.

"The thing's ridiculous!" she exclaimed.

"Ridiculous!" echoed Selby. "Certainly the interest that you seemed to take in me suggested that you were not—well, not quite blind to—to—my feeling."

He felt he was ending irritably and with an absence of dignity.

"Then you have entirely mistaken the nature of my interest, Mr. Selby," replied Mrs. Galbraith, red with shame. "We are both much too old to think of marrying again. Please never refer to this subject again."

Selby had now lost his temper. The reference at such a moment to his age—so admirably concealed, he believed—irritated him acutely. Moreover, a certain jealous

suspicion that there must be another reason for the rejection of his suit stung him like a gadfly.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "surely you can't still be infatuated about that fellow Fenner?"

But he had not finished before he recognized his mistake.

"You have no excuse for such an insulting suggestion," she flashed out at him, rising from her chair, yet not without a sense of guiltiness. "Nothing would induce me to marry again. But let me tell you this, Mr. Selby, if, as a punishment for my pride, I had to choose between you, I would choose Mr. Fenner."

There was a painful silence. Mrs. Galbraith felt that she had, in the confusion of the moment, shot an angry and vulgar arrow; Mr. Selby feared that for once in his life he had made a fool of himself. Memory, flashing back to a previous occasion when a woman had rejected him, prompted his reply.

“Then my dream is over,” he said. “Let us say no more about it. I trust, for my daughter’s sake, that what I have said may not spoil our friendship.”

“Of course it will not,” replied Mrs. Galbraith nervously. “Forgive me. I said more than I intended—more than I had a right to say. I am flattered by your offer, but it is impossible.”

They were facing one another across a writing-table. He grasped his hat and cane, preparing to leave.

“Good-bye,” he said, trying to warm his chilled pride in the sense of his own magnanimity; “we will forget my mistake and try to be friends.”

He held out his hand.

He now seemed less terrible in his admission of defeat, and she felt herself relenting.

“Before you go,” she said, “I have a favor to ask you.”

"A favor, my dear lady!" he answered; "I shall be delighted."

"It's about Octavia."

"Oh!"

What on earth had his daughter to do with it?

"Yes, Octavia. You know how fond of her I am. That's partly why this interview made me so miserable. Well, Major King is fonder of her still, and to-day he asked her to marry him."

"Good heavens!" cried Selby. "He ought never to have been encouraged. What does a widow, with everything a reasonable woman can possibly need, want with a second husband?"

"In most cases I should agree with you, Mr. Selby," Mrs. Galbraith replied. "But Octavia's case is exceptional. The favor I want to ask you is to make yourself pleasant to Major King. They have decided to be married in the autumn. From every point of

view it is an excellent match, and I congratulate myself on my share in bringing it about."

But poor Selby's magnanimity was scattered to the winds by this blow, and he suddenly became a peevish old man.

"A confounded stupid thing to encourage! I wonder it never occurred to you that some day I may want a daughter to look after me."

And now for the first time Mrs. Galbraith felt sorry for him.

"Octavia," she said, "will look after you none the worse because she happens to have a husband. Major King will make you an excellent son-in-law. He is upstairs now and anxious to see you."

"I disapprove of the marriage, and won't see him," said the disappointed Selby, moving toward the door. "It's a very stupid business. Major King ought to have consulted me, and so ought my daughter."

"They consulted me," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"I encouraged them because it is the best thing for both. As a man of the world, Mr. Selby, your disapproval strikes me as very odd."

"We won't argue about it," said Selby. "Octavia has behaved selfishly. Women are always ready to sacrifice their most serious duty to the slightest whim! I dare say she'll repent of her mistake in good time. Meanwhile I must make the best of it. The thing has come on me as a surprise, and I don't feel equal to discuss it yet with either of 'em. So I'll be off, if you don't mind."

Mrs. Galbraith rang the bell.

"Good-bye, then," returned Mrs. Galbraith. "Major King said that if you didn't care to see him now he would call on you later at your club."

"He won't find me in," said Selby, stepping into the passage.

"What a bear the man is!" thought Mrs. Galbraith, feeling that she had had the best

of one of the most humiliating interviews of her life.

As Mr. Selby, dejected, crestfallen, and overweighed by the sense of selfishness in others, stepped into the street, Lady Elsmuir drove up. The servant opened the door to her just as Mrs. Galbraith was about to convey the news of Selby's indignation to Major King and Octavia in the drawing-room.

"So you are in!" exclaimed Lady Elsmuir. "I want to see you awfully. That man Fenner of yours has put us all in a nice hole. You've seen the papers, then"—the table of the library into which Mrs. Galbraith led her guest was covered with them. "They say shocking things about the Companions, don't they?—'fanatics in feathers and lace'—one odious wretch calls us! The two horrid men actually fought like cats in Wigpole Street, it seems. Pity we weren't there! You've heard the last news?"

"No," said Mrs. Galbraith.

"Cranley has run away."

"What has he taken with him?"

Mrs. Galbraith's question was involuntary.

"Nothing, except Mrs. Palgrave, who it appears all along has acted as sort of confederate. He sold all the stones, and is afraid some one will prosecute him. But the extraordinary thing is," added Lady Elsmuir, "the stones *do* work! About that there can be absolutely no mistake!"

"That is too absurd!" cried Mrs. Galbraith.

"I knew you'd say so. But read what Cranley says."

She handed Mrs. Galbraith a type-written letter, which said:

"After the unfortunate scene in Wigpole Street, for full particulars of which I refer you to the *Planet*, sent under another cover, my further presence would be a hindrance to your ladyship's good work. My advice to your ladyship is this: stick to the stones!

In the confusion of a hurried departure I cannot find time to discuss the much-vexed question of their Divine origin, but whether or not the hand of St. Peter blessed and carved them, properly dealt with they are capable of miraculous cures, as your ladyship has proved. It may be the stones find in your Faith the Virtue they otherwise might lack; or it may be that, as the ungodly teach, 'between religious and lay faith-cures no distinction can be made, since the same working of the brain produces in each case the same effect.' Thus it is possible that, even if the stones have no higher origin than that which the liar Fenner invented, and which a vulgar Press affects to believe, the one in your ladyship's possession has become endowed with whatever healing Virtue 'goes out of' your ladyship. Prove your stone by a fair trial. That is all I ask—and keep your Faith. I am more doubtful about the others.

“I am now about to depart for my native

country. Mrs. Palgrave, a late member of your ladyship's household, has consented to share my fortunes. I trust to your ladyship's generosity to make no efforts to destroy the pleasures of our honeymoon.

"J. T. CRANLEY."

"What do you think of the letter?" Lady Elsmuir inquired, as Mrs. Galbraith returned it to her.

"I think Cranley is an impudent impostor, who has robbed you."

"He is less a rogue than your man Fenner, at all events," retorted Lady Elsmuir warmly.

"We won't quarrel about their relative dishonesty," said Mrs. Galbraith. "We've both had a lesson."

But Lady Elsmuir was not prepared to take lessons.

"Since receiving that letter," she said, "I tested the stone. This morning I cured a case of incipient paralysis!"

“Who was the patient?” inquired Mrs. Galbraith.

“An old woman—a member of the Salvation Army.”

“Did she see a doctor?”

“No. I knew you would ask me that! As though I didn't know incipient paralysis when I saw it! It was her fourth treatment, and the woman was a confirmed believer in faith-healing! On the third day she said, ‘error still held her in bondage’; but to-day, as she grasped the stone, she cried out, ‘Oh, I feel I shall be cured. I do! I do! Hallelujah! Blessed be St. Peter and his Healing Stones!’ Then she closed her eyes, clutched the stone convulsively, and repeated after me as directed, ‘Let me arise and walk, I beseech thee.’ On the third repetition of the words she cried out, ‘I'm released, your ladyship!’ and rising from the chair, walked as briskly as you like to the window! After that you can't expect me to chuck

my faith or think of breaking up the Order!"

But Mrs. Galbraith's face was quite hard. She with difficulty restrained herself from saying, "Your old woman was either hysterical, or an impostor, or a fusion of both."

"If I were you I would have nothing to do with it," she replied.

"Oh, I know it's jolly hard to believe in other people's cures; I find it so myself," said Lady Elsmuir; "but when I think of that old woman, almost helpless on Monday, and dancing about the room on Thursday, I feel determined to accept Cranley's advice, rogue though he may be. I can even forgive him for taking that Palgrave woman off with him. I have since discovered her to be a person with quite a past and a not too respectable present. In fact, I mean to stick to my Healing Stones. What do you mean to do about Wigpole Street?"

"I've done with it forever," replied Mrs. Galbraith sadly.

"I think you're quite right. Your man Fenner was really too impossible. I never really believed in him. As Douglas says, he wishes my Cranley had broken your man's neck."

"This woman's a perfect fool with her chatter," thought Mrs. Galbraith. Certainly her flippant fanaticism seemed beyond the reach of reason.

"Come and have some tea," said Mrs. Galbraith wearily.

"No, thanks. I must be off. I just wanted to see what you proposed, that's all. Good-bye. I'll let you know about cures, and feel sure you'll end in believing again. I'd ask you to see me at work, but it puts a Healer off so dreadfully."

Then Lady Elsmuir rustled forth to her carriage, and drove away feeling that she had rather "scored" off her former

rival in "Faith Healery," as mockers called it.

But still there was no peace for Mrs. Galbraith that afternoon.

No sooner had Lady Elsmuir gone than the post brought a tragic note from Eustace:

"Have you seen the papers? I am overwhelmed. Forgive me. Save a lapsing soul. Pray for it. The firm ground on which yesterday I seemed to stand is falling from me. I am penniless and heartbroken. Last night I lingered on Waterloo Bridge. The crawling flood called to me. The thought of you saved me. Will you grant me an interview, or shall I go away forever? Alas! I have not the wings which wealth gives.

"Your broken-hearted

"EUSTACE FENNER."

As Mrs. Galbraith answered this letter her face grew stern. The dark curtain had been

drawn aside, and the man's true character revealed.

"Never let me see or hear of you again," she wrote, but enclosed a check for £100.

Then she went up to the drawing-room and told Major King and Octavia what Mr. Selby had said.

"I think," said the Major, much annoyed, "I'll go and have a talk with him. He doesn't seem to quite understand."

"You'll come back to dinner?" said Mrs. Galbraith.

"Thank you," said the Major.

When he was gone Octavia exclaimed—

"My dear, don't look so changed!"

"I feel I'm slipping back to the world."

"You must always keep one foot in heaven. Remember the White Cross," said Octavia.

Mrs. Galbraith shook her head sadly.

"If I had gone on with it," she said, "I might have become as great a fool as Lady Elsmuir."

“Impossible,” Octavia replied. “There’s no method in her madness, but vanity.”

Octavia was still trying to comfort her friend when the servant came and said that Mr. Fenner had called and begged to see her.

“Don’t go!” cried Octavia. “Let me get rid of him for you. I easily can.”

“Show Mr. Fenner into the library,” said Mrs. Galbraith.

The servant left.

“He’ll only worry you again,” urged Octavia. “Don’t see him.”

“Here is the letter he wrote to me,” replied Mrs. Galbraith.

Octavia read it.

“Nonsense!” she exclaimed. “‘The crawling flood’ never called for him. He is much more likely to get tipsy than to drown himself. Shall I tell you something which will prevent you pitying him?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Galbraith.

“The horror asked me to marry him at

Lady Elsmuir's, four days before he had the impudence to propose to you!"

The blood rushed over Mrs. Galbraith's face, then left it pale. She seemed to bend beneath the shame of the blow.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Octavia, "we must read *Tartuffe* together. What does it matter? It is the fate of the good and true to feed the hypocritical parasite. Forget he ever existed."

Mrs. Galbraith slowly walked to the door and descended to the library.

"I think she is safe now," Octavia thought.

Meanwhile, in the library, Eustace Fenner was nervously awaiting the arrival of his patroness, haggard, shaken, and aged by his overthrow. The air of a barrel organ—a comic irritant of the music halls—reaching him through the open window set his shattered thoughts to a discordant jig. All dignity, all hope had now vanished, but as a melancholy compensation he realized the full

pathos of his position, standing outside the ruins, as it were, and contemplating the smash in the completest abandonment of self-pity.

He stood with his back against the light when Mrs. Galbraith entered the room, and saw, with a sharp pang, the look of aversion on her face.

“Why did you come?” she asked. “I told you not to. Have you no shame? Could you not understand that my letter—with the money in it—was final? What can I say to you? What can you say to me—that can be said between us? We both know I’m the dupe, you the nimble-witted cheat who overreached himself at last.”

“Think what you like,” he replied. “It matters little now. This only will I say: I was never conscious of concealing the truth—never! In our case, whatever delusion there has been was self-created. I deeply regret that I helped bring humiliation on you. From you I never received anything but the

most generous kindness. I never felt anything but the deepest affection for your saintly character."

"Not when you asked me to marry you four days after Mrs. Lee refused you?"

The blow silenced Eustace for a moment.

"She told you, then?" he said at last.

"This minute—to save me from you, as she thought, when you insisted on coming after I begged—and, as I hoped, had purchased—the right never to see you again. Why have you forced me to tell you how deeply you have taught me to despise you?"

He quailed under her words, shame-stricken and daunted. In the fixed lines of her face he now saw all hope of forgiveness gone.

"Why did you come?" she repeated. "Why?"

"I think it was," he answered, "to tell you the truth. It is women like yourself, who cultivate credulity as though it were one of the fine arts, who are chiefly to blame for such

failures as mine. We try to live up to what you can believe. The false prophet finds his disciples ready made. He takes his doctrine from them, and a new fad, ready made, begins to walk the earth whenever he breathes upon it. But to this I will swear. You are, of all the kindly, foolish people who helped to make Wigpole Street notorious, the one whom it pained me to delude. If you ask me what I really believe, I cannot truthfully tell—unless it be in the fat things which the devil prepares for his elect, so often the text of my sermons! Still, there have been moments—they may even recur—when I have fully believed what I tried to teach. The difference between us has been that you always believed them. There is this weakness in all religious enthusiasm. Faith is never a fixed quantity, but a fluid ideal always in danger of falling into unutterable foolishness. If I had been a woman, probably I should have quite deceived myself—being a man, I couldn't.

The authority of the Catholic Church alone has kept it strong. Behind it you always see the intelligent guidance of the human mind."

"I have had enough theology, Mr. Fenner," she said; "nothing you can say will ever make me doubt the goodness of God."

He looked at her pathetically a moment, half envying her a faith beyond his understanding.

"I shall not ask you to forgive me," he said half defiantly. "I was so splendidly equipped for my work on all sides but one."

He moved toward the door dejectedly. She remained silent, with tightly closed lips. All the gentle serenity that had made him almost love her had vanished.

He was painfully conscious of the change. It brought the conviction of his own abasement more vividly before him than the most eloquent abuse could have done. Was it pos-

sible that he was the same Eustace Fenner who had lately left this kindly house as a dear friend and an honored guest?

The ready tears gathered in his eyes. She saw them unmoved.

“Good-bye,” he said, “good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she replied.

He walked slowly from the room. The footman, in supercilious silence, opened the front door.

In the street the hot wind was twisting the dust and tiny leaves in whirling eddies, which died away as suddenly as they rose. The whole familiar aspect of the place seemed changed. London had suddenly acquired a homeless, dreary look. The adventurer must begin all over again, but with slackened energy and wrecked hopes. He glanced up regretfully at the house with its hospitable memories, now forever closed against him, then with round shoulders and drooping brows moved slowly away, till he was lost in

the human tide which swept round the Marble Arch.

“Well,” said Octavia, when Mrs. Galbraith, pale and sad, returned to the drawing-room, “has he gone?”

“Yes.”

“For good and all?”

“I shall never see him again. But don’t speak of him.”

So they sat together in silence. Mrs. Galbraith found no great joy in her escape. Her pride had been humbled, her faith in humanity shaken.

Relief came to the tension when the maid entered the room to say that Miss Edith wished to know whether she might come down. In the excitement of the evening the child had been forgotten.

“Certainly she may,” replied Mrs. Galbraith.

The child, waiting outside for permission, danced in.

"Oh, auntie!" she cried, "do let me sit up to dinner to-night."

"So you shall, dearest," answered Mrs. Galbraith sadly, "if mother will let you. It is to celebrate a new sort of birthday of mine, Octavia."

"Fancy having a new sort of birthday! How funny!" exclaimed the child.

"Go and tell Parker to dress you, then," said Octavia quickly. "Auntie Edith spoils you."

The child departed, and the two women again sat in silence, the younger looking forward, the elder gazing backward across the ruins of shattered illusions.

Outside the shadows were lengthening; a feathery fragment of the new moon shone whitely in the sun's retreating glow. The beauty of the still sky drew them both to the window.

"It is a much vaster and grander world than they dream in Wigpole Street," said

Octavia. "There is only one faith: trust in the goodness of God." She turned to her friend, kissed her on the cheek, down which a slow tear was trickling—"and that you will always have."

FINIS





